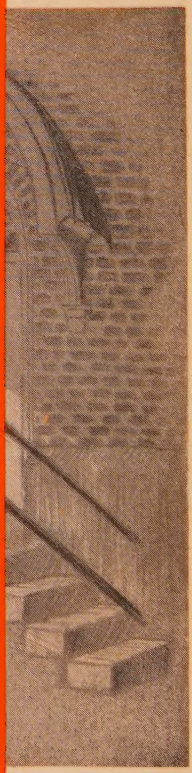
THE SECOND MAN

A COMEDY
IN THREE ACTS
BY
S. N. BEHRMAN

Helen H. Adams



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THE SECOND MAN

A Comedy in Three Acts

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BY

S. N. BEHRMAN

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THE THEATRE GUILD

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TO
MY BROTHERS

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". . . For, together with, and as it were behind, so much pleasurable emotion, there is always that other strange second man in me, calm, critical, observant, unmoved, blasé, odious."

—Lord Leighton: *Letter to his sister*

TICE

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THE CAST OF THE THEATRE GUILD PRODUCTION
As presented at the Guild Theatre, New York, April 11, 1927

THE SECOND MAN

A Comedy in Three Acts
By S. N. BEHRMAN
The Production Directed by Philip Moeller
Settings by Jo Mielziner

CHARACTERS
(In the Order of Appearance)

Mrs. Kendall Frayne ..... Lynn Fontanne
Clark Storey ..... Alfred Lunt
Austin Lowe ..... Earle Larimore
Monica Grey ..... Margola Gillmore
Albert ..... Edward Hartford

The Scene is laid in Clark Storey's Apartment in West Fifty-Sixth Street, New York City.

The Curtain is lowered in Act Two for one minute to note the passing of time.

ACT I—Storey's Studio—Late afternoon.
ACT II—Scene 1—The same—After dinner the same day.
Scene 2—Eleven o'clock that night.
ACT III—The same—The next morning.

Stage Manager—Edward Hartford

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THE SECOND MAN

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The living-room of a duplex apartment of a studio-building on the West Side. The proscenium displaces the great windows typical of these apartments; midway up the rear wall is visible the railed landing of the stairs leading to the upper bedrooms. The great room is comfortably furnished, a slight preponderance of the "exotic" in furnishing. The walls are lined with book-shelves wherever convenient. There are books and magazines in profusion everywhere. On the right, near the fireplace, is a long, low, extremely comfortable looking armchair; leaning against it is an ordinary sewing board. On the other side of this chair is a low tabouret on which repose writing materials and a telephone. Not far from this armchair, also, just below the fireplace, is a small "portable" gramophone on a small stand.*

AT RISE: MRS. KENDALL FRAYNE *is discovered walking nervously about near the armchair. She is a tall, handsome, beautifully dressed woman, about*

thirty-five. She might be described as "majestic"; she has a fine face; her voice is beautifully modulated and restrained even when she speaks under the stress of deep feeling.

She is nervous and angry. Keeps looking at her watch. Takes up the manuscript of a story on the tabouret, and drops it when she sees she has already read it. Finally she makes up her mind to leave; grasps her fur wrap, lying on a chair. At the door she stops, returns to the telephone. Her voice is calm as she asks for the number.

KENDALL

[*At the telephone*] Gramercy 4304 please—yes—may I speak to Mr. Storey please?—I believe he lunched at the Club and I thought he might still be there—thank you so much— [*She holds the receiver to her ear, sitting on the arm of the chair*]—yes—about how long ago?—thank you.

[*She takes up her wrap again with a sweeping gesture. This time she means really to go. She goes upstage and disappears in the little hallway leading to the corridor. The telephone tinkles. She runs back, quite excited and answers the call.*]

KENDALL

[*At 'phone*] Yes. Yes, the line *was* busy—who?—no, Mr. Storey is not in—this—this is a friend of his—is there any message?—oh, Miss Grey—this is Mrs.

Frayne—how do you do?—yes—he *was* here but stepped out—he'll be back in a few minutes—I'm leaving now but I'll leave the message for him. Not at all. Good-bye.

[*She hangs up again. She is thoroughly angry, humiliated. She writes out message. Starts upstage.* CLARK STOREY *rushes in.*]

STOREY

Awfully sorry.

KENDALL

I'm leaving.

STOREY

Oh, come! I'm not *so* late.

KENDALL

Only an hour.

STOREY

The distinguished Englishman *insisted* on my dropping into his hotel with him. We got to talking—I told him his heroines were all neurotic and his heroes——

KENDALL

I've got to go.

[*She tries to cross him.*]

STOREY

Honestly, Kendall, I rushed up here as fast as I could. Had a fight with one taxi-driver and it took me

hours to find another. Please don't be angry. I'm full of things to tell you——

KENDALL

This always happens.

STOREY

Besides, I thought you'd be quite comfortable. I left my new story for you to read.

KENDALL

That took exactly fifteen minutes.

STOREY

Only that? Really, I must write a novel. Then I can be late with impunity. Great idea for a publisher's blurb: "This novel is so absorbing that a jealous woman, waiting for the author to keep an appointment, forgot all about him——"

KENDALL

Really, you've got to stop treating me like this!

STOREY

I swear I only stayed on so long because I thought it would amuse you to hear about the great English novelist. I kept saying to myself: "This will amuse Kendall——!"

KENDALL

Don't talk like that to me. It's all right for Monica Grey. It's transparent to me. She just telephoned you, by the way.

STOREY

What did she want?

KENDALL

You—— It was humiliating. I had to say you had gone out. Of course she understood that I was waiting for you.

STOREY

Oh, well, everybody in town was at that luncheon. The great novelist is tall and thin and has a red beard. I suspect that if he shaved it would be discovered that he has no chin. And I was delighted to find what I already suspected from reading his novels—he has no sense of humour.

KENDALL

Because he didn't find your flippancy amusing?

STOREY

It's as good a test as any.

KENDALL

He's a genius. It shows on nearly every page of his writing.

STOREY

I dare say he is a genius. Sad thing about geniuses —almost invariably lack humour. It's true. Genius is a sort of fanaticism——

[*The telephone rings.*]

KENDALL

I'm going.

STOREY

Please—just a minute—— [*At phone.*] You're doing it—who is this?—oh, hello there, Austin—what about?—Monica again?—I thought you were all set —oh, you take her too seriously—I'm busy right now —Mrs. Frayne—oh, sure—say twenty minutes—bye-bye. [*He hangs up.*] Austin Lowe. Wants to weep on my shoulder. All burned up about Monica Grey.

KENDALL

And she's burned up about you.

STOREY

Nonsense. A baby. Doesn't know what she wants.

KENDALL

I think she does. [*Casually.*] Why don't you marry her?

STOREY

I have other plans.

KENDALL

Meaning?

STOREY

Meaning you.

KENDALL

Why should you want to marry me? Outside of the fact that—you love comfort and I am—rich.

STOREY

Outside of the fact that I love comfort—and that you are rich—I like you very much. I like you enormously. You're the most intelligent woman I know.

KENDALL

Not so intelligent. I discovered that—just—now—waiting for you.

STOREY

How come?

KENDALL

I was—jealous.

STOREY

[*Wickedly*] Of the celebrated English novelist? You misunderstand me, Kendall.

KENDALL

Jealous of your self-sufficiency. Your independence of me. I saw you there talking, enjoying yourself,

revelling in your own fluency. I realized perfectly well that you must have forgotten me or, if you did think of me, that you must be saying: "Oh, she'll wait—" I was jealous, Storey.

STOREY

You too! My last hope is gone.

KENDALL

You see, Storey, you aren't in the least bit in love with me.

STOREY

I feel a much rarer, more stable emotion—friendliness and all sorts of affection and——

KENDALL

I know.

STOREY

I was hoping we—you and I—might demonstrate the triumph of the loveless marriage.

KENDALL

How old are you, Storey?

STOREY

What did I tell you the last time you asked me?

KENDALL

I believe you said twenty-eight.

STOREY

I lied. I'm thirty.

KENDALL

I'm thirty-five.

STOREY

Delightful age.

KENDALL

When I'm forty-five you won't be any older than you are now.

STOREY

Won't I!

KENDALL

Suppose you fall in love?

STOREY

I'm through with that sort of thing.

KENDALL

You sound so young sometimes—so naïve.

STOREY

But I've been through that sort of thing. I know.

KENDALL

I can't imagine you really in love.

STOREY

But I assure you I was. It lasted two years. I suffered. I agonized.

KENDALL

Who was she?

STOREY

No one you know. She's married now. Has children and a dull husband, a dull home. I see her occasionally. And I wonder at myself. Was it for her I felt that base emotion—jealousy? Was it for her I used to wait in a torment of anxiety and anticipation? It seems impossible now. Such a nice, unimaginative, plodding creature. I see her and I wonder.

KENDALL

It may happen again—without warning.

STOREY

I doubt it. I'm fed up with love. It's a mirage, an illusion, a sort of pathology, feeds on being unsatisfied, rejected. Attain love and it vanishes—vanishes into the thin air or solidifies into such things as comfort and affection—things which you and I would have from the start, my dear.

KENDALL

[*Doubtfully*] All this is very pretty——

STOREY

[*The 'phone rings*] That damn telephone—— [*Taking it up.*] Yes—hello, Monica—how are you?—yes, Mrs. Frayne told me—I'd just stepped out to buy her a magazine with a poem of mine in it—oh, a trifle—not one of my major works—you've got to see me?—Austin just called me and told me the same thing—what've you been doing to him?—now don't be a silly child—you're lucky to have him—it's no good you're coming to see me—I sha'n't coddle you—no, don't come; I sha'n't be here—I—— [*She has put down the receiver on him. In disgust.*] Crazy kid!

KENDALL

Gracious! You *are* pursued by women!

STOREY

Now there's a case—Monica Grey! Poor as a church mouse. Mother at her wit's end to keep up the pretence of a conservative gentility. And here's Austin Lowe absolutely dotty about her. A millionaire and a great man to boot——

KENDALL

[*Gently*] He *is* dull, Storey.

STOREY

Dull! One of the most promising young chemists in America. Under thirty and he's actually discovered

something new—a new way of doing something or other. He's an F.R.S.!

KENDALL

Yes. And a B–O–R–E.

STOREY

If there's one man on earth I envy it's Austin Lowe. If I had his money and his brain—the vices I'd encourage—the secrets I'd explore——!

KENDALL

In that case I'm glad you haven't his money and I'm certainly glad you haven't his brain.

STOREY

Just because he's not glib, like I am!

KENDALL

He never has anything interesting to say——

STOREY

I can talk, can't I? And that impresses you. But Austin's a great man who's made a contribution to science while I'm an imitative poet and a second-rate short-story writer.

KENDALL

You *are* a dear, Storey.

STOREY

Well, it's true!

KENDALL

I'll make a great sacrifice: Monica can have the great man. I'll take the second-rate short-story writer.

STOREY

You'll get your preference. Austin can't see any one in the world but Monica.

KENDALL

She doesn't care much for him, though.

STOREY

She will. I'll let you in on a little secret——

KENDALL

Yes?

STOREY

Austin and Monica are engaged.

KENDALL

Really? It's not announced, is it?

STOREY

It just happened yesterday. Austin telephoned me in a perfect ecstasy.

KENDALL

I gather he's in less of an ecstasy to-day——

STOREY

Oh, Monica's a crazy kid. And being completely in love with her Austin's at her mercy.

KENDALL

Miss Grey is rather adorable. Likes to be—audacious—doesn't she?

STOREY

Really an innocent. A Tennysonian ingenue with a Freudian patter.

KENDALL

Something appealingly wistful about her.

STOREY

Actually she has all the picture-book illusions of a *Saturday Evening Post* heroine—but she's picked up the vocabulary of the intelligentsia. Don't let it deceive you.

KENDALL

Are you urging her to marry Austin?

STOREY

Urge her? My dear, I insist on it.

KENDALL

Why?

STOREY

Why? Because Austin'll make an admirable husband for her. She'll settle down and have babies and live in luxury. Her mother'll spend her old age in comfort. And—so shall I!

KENDALL

You're incorrigible.

STOREY

I have enormous respect for money. You can't appreciate it. It can only be felt by those whose past was poverty-stricken and whose present—is precarious.

KENDALL

You could make a fortune if you worked harder.

STOREY

I doubt it. I'm too intelligent to write commercial truck and incapable of writing great stuff. It's unfortunate. No, my dear. The only solution for me is to persuade you to marry me.

KENDALL

Would you want to marry me if I were poor?

STOREY

That would be presumptuous.

KENDALL

Presumptuous?

STOREY

Only the rich should offer to marry poor girls. They are the only ones who can afford it.

KENDALL

You're awfully mercenary.

STOREY

I'm mature. But I am honest as well as mercenary. If you do marry me—I promise—I absolutely promise—not to live above your income——

KENDALL

[*Amused*] I can't be angry with you.

STOREY

Why should you be angry with me?

KENDALL

Keeping me waiting an hour.

STOREY

At least I wasn't with another woman.

KENDALL

I suppose that will come too.

STOREY

I'll always come back to you.

KENDALL

You make me feel like a——

STOREY

Like a terminal?

KENDALL

Honestly, I wish I'd never met you.

STOREY

You don't mean that. Think of the nice times we've had together.

KENDALL

I feel you'll make me very unhappy.

STOREY

Only momentarily. And never wilfully.

KENDALL

Anyway, I wish I weren't in love with you.

STOREY

You won't be—long.

KENDALL

It's lasted now—three years.

STOREY

But most of that time your husband was alive.

KENDALL

[*After a moment*] Storey—outside of being in love with you—I'm very fond of you. I feel such fine things in you. If only you wouldn't waste yourself so, if only you'd make the effort to live up to the best in you——

STOREY

Oh, now, Kendall, don't you be fooled too. I'm living up to the best in me, right now.

KENDALL

But you potter so. You're not concentrated on anything.

STOREY

But I've a talent for pottering.

KENDALL

I feel you could do great work——

STOREY

Now don't you go on having illusions about me. I have a certain facility for turning out pretty stuff——

KENDALL

I'm sure you could do great things.

STOREY

You are mistaken. I know my limitations. Nor have I any craving for immortality. When I'm rich—when

I'm married to you—I probably sha'n't write at all. I'll be—what I've always wanted to be—a prosperous dilettante.

KENDALL

I never can tell when you're joking——

STOREY

I assure you I'm perfectly serious now. What this country needs is a dilettante class, interested in art with no desire to make money out of it. Why shouldn't there be an amateur class in art, as there is in sport?

KENDALL

Is this a pose?

STOREY

I assure you it isn't. Quite the contrary. At least you can't say afterwards that I married you under false pretences. I tell you now I'm an adventurer—intellectually and morally—an *arriviste* with one virtue —honesty.

KENDALL

Well, I've got you on my hands. I suppose I'll have to make the best of you.

STOREY

You'd better—

[*He rises—kisses her lightly—folds her coat about her.*]

KENDALL

[*Turns and watches him—amused*] I gather you're dismissing me.

STOREY

Well, I have to do some work.
[*With a gesture toward the manuscript.*]

KENDALL

[*Laughing*] What?

STOREY

I haven't touched that since this morning. And Austin's coming in——

KENDALL

And Miss Grey.

STOREY

You heard me tell her I wouldn't be home.

KENDALL

I heard her say she was coming.

STOREY

What can one do? It'll be a relief to me when these two are married off.

KENDALL

To me, too.

STOREY

Are you going out to-night?

KENDALL

I don't think so.

STOREY

Suppose I ring you—5:30ish. You might dine here. I'll order dinner from downstairs.

KENDALL

All right. By the way, Storey——

STOREY

Yes?

KENDALL

It's—the end of the month. If you're a bit short—I might lend you a little.

STOREY

Ken, you demoralize me.

KENDALL

Here's a check. You can pay me when your ship comes in.

[*She gives* STOREY *the check. He puts it on table.*]

STOREY

You *are* a darling! I suppose it's dreadful to take money from a woman. But why it's worse than taking it from a man I don't know. Do you?

KENDALL

It all depends——

STOREY

Really, Kendall, you've got to marry me right away —to save my self-respect.

KENDALL

What do you want your self-respect for?

STOREY

I haven't the least idea——

KENDALL

[*Slapping him*] Half-wit . . .

STOREY

[*Affectionately*] Darling . . . [*He walks out with her, returns a moment later. Goes to telephone.*] Restaurant, please—Mr. Storey speaking—I want dinner for two for to-night—seven thirty—up here. Oysters, small ones—clear soup—supreme of chicken with mushrooms—salad—yes—yes—thank you, Frederic——

[*He hangs up, takes off his coat, puts on dressing-gown, an elaborate one, yellow silk-lined with wide sleeves and brilliant sash. Settles himself into the easy chair, puts the sewing board across its arms, making a bridge on which he puts the writing-paper and starts to create. Inspiration is halting; he lights a*

cigarette. The lamp is too bright. He pins a piece of newspaper over it. Something in paper attracts his attention. He takes out the pin—leans back in chair and reads it. The door-bell rings. He gets up and goes to door admitting AUSTIN LOWE. *Leaves him and comes back to his chair.* AUSTIN *is fattish, serious, woe-begone.* STOREY'S *manner to him is extremely friendly.*]

STOREY

[*With a wave toward his work*] I was in the middle of an immortal sentence . . .

AUSTIN

I'm sorry, old man. I *had* to see you.

STOREY

You look seedy.

AUSTIN

Didn't sleep a wink last night.

STOREY

Cocktail?

AUSTIN

[*Miserably*] Nothing.

STOREY

Do you good.

AUSTIN

I couldn't, really. Couldn't even eat my lunch.

STOREY

What's the matter? Don't tell me that discovery you made turned out to be old stuff.

AUSTIN

It's nothing to do with that.

STOREY

There's an idea. Scientist works twenty years on a scent—finally gets it. Rushes to the Science Club or wherever scientists rush when they've found something. When he gets there the boss tells him: "Sorry, old man, but Professor Funkenwangler got this yesterday—here's his cable——"

AUSTIN

[*Irritably*] I tried to get you twenty times to-day. Last night, too. Where the devil've you been?

STOREY

Been? Let's see—where the devil have I been? Oh, last night I went to a party. Then on to Charmian Drew's. Know her?

AUSTIN

No.

STOREY

Very pretty girl. Got back at six this morning. Got up in time to go to lunch to meet Stryker Collins, the English novelist. Know his stuff?

AUSTIN

No.

STOREY

Vastly over-rated, if you ask me. The heroines're always throwing things at the heroes. Never saw such nasty women.

AUSTIN

I'm awful low to-day, Storey, old man.

STOREY

[*Affecting surprise*] Low? Really? You seem so gay——

[AUSTIN *gives him a woeful look.*]

AUSTIN

It's about Monica.

STOREY

Monica?

AUSTIN

She's thrown me over.

STOREY

Nonsense.

AUSTIN

Says she won't marry me.

STOREY

You take that child too seriously, Austin.

AUSTIN

But she means it this time, Storey. Told me last night. Says it's all over. Gave me back—the ring. See. Here——

[*Shows him the ring which he fumbles miserably.*]

STOREY

[*Looking critically at the ring*] I'm glad she did. Never was crazy about that ring. Neither was Monica, I imagine. You can return it now and get her something less—conventional. I'll go with you to Cartier's. The other day I saw a stunning oblong emerald——

AUSTIN

But don't you see! She doesn't want my ring. Any ring. She doesn't want me.

STOREY

What's her reason? For suddenly——

AUSTIN

Said when she promised to marry me she yielded to outside pressure——

STOREY

Her little mother.

AUSTIN

Said she acted against her better nature. Now she says she realizes she doesn't love me—that she never could love me. What shall I do now, Storey?

STOREY

Leave her alone for a week and—try again.

AUSTIN

The worst of it is——

STOREY

What?

AUSTIN

She loves somebody else.

STOREY

She said so?

AUSTIN

Yes.

STOREY

Who?

AUSTIN

Wouldn't tell me.

STOREY

I don't believe it.

AUSTIN

Why not?

STOREY

She'd have told *me*.

AUSTIN

You think so?

STOREY

Certainly.

AUSTIN

She would, unless——

STOREY

Unless what?

AUSTIN

Unless the man she loves—is you.

STOREY

I? You're crazy, Austin.

AUSTIN

[*Breathless*] She likes you. She likes you better than me, that's plain. It's a wonder to me you *don't* marry her.

STOREY

Austin, you're losing your sense of humour. Fancy my being married to Monica. She'd leave me in six months. By which time I should certainly have left her.

AUSTIN

[*Wanting to be contradicted*] I don't see why.

STOREY

She's penniless, for one thing. She couldn't stand the poverty of my menage and—neither could I.

AUSTIN

I can't understand it. You're not in love with her?

STOREY

There speaks the eternal lover. I think it strange you *are* in love with her. She's pretty—I grant you that. But, great Heavens, man—so *young*.

AUSTIN

[*Rapt*] She *is* young.

STOREY

And so full of spirits!

AUSTIN

Isn't she?

STOREY

Always laughing. Like the constant ringing of chimes.

AUSTIN

It is like chimes.

STOREY

You've certainly got it bad, Austin.

AUSTIN

I can't think of anything else. It—it—obsesses me.

STOREY

[*A bit wickedly*] After all, you have your science.

AUSTIN

You think that means anything to me now? When I've lost her? I tell you I can't work since I've known Monica.

STOREY

Your researches?

AUSTIN

They're all nothing. I can't do a thing. I don't give a damn. It's only—Monica.

STOREY

[*Shaking his head*] What an illusion that is about the cold mastery of scientific men! Look at you—helpless as a baby.

AUSTIN

And the worst of it is there's nothing to do. It's not like a problem—that you can work at. She just doesn't love me. And that's all there is to it. I'm sunk.

STOREY

If you want her—really want her—you can get her.

AUSTIN

That's what you always say. But it's not true.

STOREY

[*Lighting a cigarette*] No doubt about it. I'm sure.

AUSTIN

But she told me—last night——

STOREY

She doesn't in the least know what she wants. Won't till after she's married. That's up to you——

AUSTIN

But she's not attracted to me.

STOREY

She doesn't understand you. She has no appreciation of your intellectual gifts.

AUSTIN

[*Sadly*] That's true. My work means nothing to her.

STOREY

Why don't you make it mean something to her? Teach her to see how wonderful it is. Go on about the marvellous delicacy of your experiments.

AUSTIN

If I could only talk like you!

STOREY

That's easy.

AUSTIN

How?

STOREY

Cultivate superficiality.

AUSTIN

If she only understood me—as you do!

STOREY

She shall be made to.

AUSTIN

How?

STOREY

[*Lighting another cigarette*] Maternal pressure. I'll wager you anything a starved writer can pay that Mrs. Grey doesn't know Monica's refused you.

AUSTIN

What if she did?

STOREY

She'd raise hell. You see the old lady's dreadfully afraid—of guess what?

AUSTIN

What?

STOREY

That Monica will marry *me*.

AUSTIN

There, you see. Even she's noticed it.

STOREY

A good thing, too. Might be a fine thing to persuade Mrs. Grey that *I* want to marry Monica. She'll never rest then until Monica's married to you.

AUSTIN

What makes you think so?

STOREY

Monica's mother's perfectly cracked about the idea of having you for a son-in-law. Oh, it's not your scientific eminence. It's not even your family, though of course that has something to do with it. It's your money, my friend, your lucre, your multitudinous boodle——

AUSTIN

I can hardly believe——

STOREY

Sorry, but that's what it is. The Greys are mighty hard up. Monica's been dressing shamefully of late——

AUSTIN

[*Truculently*] She looks better——

STOREY

I know. Niftier in gingham than a fine lady in velvet.

AUSTIN

She looks wonderful in anything.

STOREY

How extraordinary that a little girl like Monica can make a man like you talk like a hack writer!

AUSTIN

[*Bristling*] Look here, I don't quite like your tone about Monica!

STOREY

Don't misunderstand me. Oh, I'm awfully fond of her. But she *is* a spoiled little minx, shallow as a platter. Her lack of appreciation of you proves that.

AUSTIN

[*Pathetically*] Well, she's only twenty. Sometimes I think I'm too old for her.

STOREY

You're only twenty-nine.

AUSTIN

It's not that alone. She's so gay, so full of fun. I can't—prattle, Storey. I don't follow her small talk.

STOREY

Her talk is not small. It is infinitesimal. Your microscopic training should help you.

AUSTIN

I don't do the things she likes—dance, play tennis—you know.

STOREY

[*Regarding him judicially*] You're not a jazz figure, Austin. But you'd better marry her anyway. If you don't she'll run away with a tenor or something.

AUSTIN

You keep telling me to marry her as if I didn't want to. Damn it, Storey, I'd give my soul——

STOREY

I don't think that will be necessary. But you might make some other sacrifices.

AUSTIN

I'll do anything——

STOREY

Take this thing more lightly, can't you? You've fallen in love like an awkward school-boy—not like a man of the world.

AUSTIN

But I'm not a man of the world.

STOREY

Can't you act the base rôle? When Monica's around you get positively tongue-tied. All you can do is silently register adoration.

AUSTIN

I know it. I can't help it. When I do think of something to say it sounds so inadequate to me that I don't say it.

STOREY

If you'd only remember that everything's on your side. You've so much to offer.

AUSTIN

I wish I thought so.

STOREY

If you persist, you'll win her, as the military men say, by attrition.

[*"Attrition" is a good word for future use. He makes notation on Ms.*]

AUSTIN

She told me not to try to see her, not to call her on the telephone. I tell you, Storey, I don't know what to do with myself.

STOREY

[*Shaking his head*] You're a great argument against celibacy, Austin, old boy.

AUSTIN

You know, Storey, I used to think—before I met Monica—that I'd never marry a girl unless she wanted

me as much as I wanted her. But that was before I wanted anybody—as I want Monica. [*Passionately.*] I'd marry her on any terms, you understand? It's beyond—pride. You understand?

STOREY

Of course I understand. And I'll do everything I can to help you, believe me.

AUSTIN

[*Fervently*] You're a brick, Storey.

STOREY

Now, look here. I've got to do a little work. Why don't you go around the corner to the Chemist's Club, look over some of those fascinating magazines full of algebraic formulas and come back here to dine?

AUSTIN

That's awfully good of you, Storey, really. I hate to be alone.

STOREY

I know.

AUSTIN

You're the only person I can talk to.

STOREY

Come back—say twenty minutes. I'll order dinner from downstairs.

AUSTIN

You make it so easy for your friends to impose on you, Storey. You're swell.

STOREY

Don't deceive yourself, old boy. I get a sadistic pleasure out of watching you writhe. And your pathetic reliance on me gives me a sense of superiority.

AUSTIN

Always joking!

STOREY

It's the grim truth.

AUSTIN

You're the finest——

STOREY

[*Hustles him to door*] Come now, Austin, run along. See you in twenty minutes.

AUSTIN

[*At door*] Er—there's something else.

STOREY

Yes.

AUSTIN

I've been wanting to speak to you about it for some time.

STOREY

Well, spit it out.

AUSTIN

It's about money.

STOREY

My favourite subject.

AUSTIN

Er—your writing. Does it—I mean to say—does it bring you in very much?

STOREY

Not what it should. I'm caviare to the general, Austin.

AUSTIN

That's what I thought. Well—you see—I mean to say—you see—well, damn it all, I'm so rich, Storey. Won't you let me help you out occasionally?

STOREY

Of course I will.

AUSTIN

[*Reaching eagerly into his pocket*] That's fine—I——

STOREY

Oh, not now. I've got a check on the table now—I don't even know how much it is—— [*Goes to the table and unfolds check* MRS. FRAYNE *has left.*] Five hundred.

AUSTIN

For a story?

STOREY

Yes.

AUSTIN

That's more than we chemists get——

STOREY

But next time I'm broke—it'll probably be next week—I'll let you know.

AUSTIN

Any time. It'll be a pleasure.

STOREY

It's a pleasure I sha'n't deny you. So long, Austin.

AUSTIN

Good-bye, old man. Awfully good of you to let me come back.

STOREY

Don't mention it. [AUSTIN *goes out.* STOREY *goes to his armchair. There is a smile on his lips. After a moment of meditation he reaches for the telephone.*] Regent 2772—please—Mrs. Frayne—Mr. Storey—hello, Ken—I've changed my mind about dining here—let's go out somewhere—yes, I did order it but I'm going to let two other people eat it—and—Kendall—

will you call me up in about twenty minutes—never mind what I say—just 'phone me. Comedy, my dear —tell you later—I'll come to your place about six-thirty—sha'n't dress, no—yes, I'm working now—oh, pretty well—not many sentences but distinguished. Good-bye, Mrs. Frayne, see you later. [*He hangs up, puts board across the arms of his chair, as before, begins to write. He sees "attrition" on his Ms. Goes to dictionary. Finds it. Goes back to his board, spelling it. Writes a few lines. Door-bell rings. He ignores it. It rings again, four short rings. Then, shouting:*] Door's open!

MONICA

[*Bursting in*] Hello, darling. Working? *She is young, vibrant, utterly charming.*]

STOREY

Trying to.

MONICA

Sorry I came?

STOREY

[*Drily*] Well——!

MONICA

I don't care in the least. I'm delighted to see you. [*She puts her face against his cheek.*]

STOREY

Don't muss me.

MONICA

Just had to see you, Storey. The one person in the world I wanted to see.

STOREY

Everybody's told me that to-day. I begin to feel like a Father Confessor.

MONICA

Glad to see me? Tell the truth.

STOREY

[*Grumbling*] Been trying to work all afternoon——

MONICA

You fib. You *are* glad. You know you are.

STOREY

[*Writing*] Oh, I don't mind you.

MONICA

I bet you're more than glad. I bet you're thrilled, excited.

STOREY

Modest creature.

MONICA

I'm confident you're in love with me, Storey, but you're too big a fool to tell me so.

STOREY

[*Continuing writing*] I thought we'd settled all that.

MONICA

You thought you did. You thought I'd quietly succumb and marry Austin.

STOREY

Oh, you're staying!

MONICA

But I'm not going to. Hear that, Storey? I'm not going to——

[*He finishes a page and starts a fresh one, putting the finished one on the tabouret beside him.*]

MONICA

[*Taking the last page*] Oh, may I?

STOREY

Be through in a minute.

MONICA

[*Reading*] Don't stop on my account.

STOREY

[*Grimly*] Oh, well, enough of creation——

[*He throws down his pen.*]

MONICA

[*Absorbed*] Oh, this is awfully interesting.

STOREY

[*Same tone*] Think so, do you?
[*He sounds suddenly weary.*]

MONICA

I love it. [*She reads:*] "They had been dancing and he asked her to go outside with him. They stepped out through the open French windows, crossed the lawn and walked down a narrow path between high poplars. . . . The tree-tops made hedges in the sky between which the stars grew like buttercups. Buttercups. . . ." That's lovely.

STOREY

Go on.

MONICA

"It was a most curious moon, red-bronze in colour, wafer-thin, exquisitely curved, a shaving of a moon. Courtney allowed himself to speculate to the girl beside him. 'God,' he said. Oh, excuse me, 'God,' he said, 'must be a curious person to fashion such a moon, a butcher with artistic leanings. Or was he an artist suffering from a sadistic stavism?' Which did she think. The girl thought it was slightly chilly and hadn't they better go back to the ball-room?" Oh, I think that's wonderful. So—ironic!

STOREY

You think it's wonderful?

MONICA

I think everything you write is wonderful.

STOREY

I'm sorry I can't agree with you. Scented dish-water, that's what it is. Dish-water with eau de cologne in it.

MONICA

What a funny mood you're in!

STOREY

It annoys me to have you keep prattling that my stuff's wonderful. What do you know about it? Have you ever read anything except movie magazines? Have you——?

MONICA

Oh, now, Storey, please don't scold me. Not to-day. To-day I want you to be nice to me.

STOREY

[*Rising*] What's this about you and Austin?

MONICA

I can't go through with it, Storey. That's all.

STOREY

But you told me—you definitely told me—you'd made up your mind to marry him.

MONICA

[*Whimpering a bit*] You're not a bit nice to-day.

STOREY

You're such an awful dumb-bell, Monica.

MONICA

I'm not. You're a dumb-bell. Here—sit down and let me get comfy—and I'll tell you all about it . . . I'm going to sit on your lap.
[*She does it.*]

STOREY

[*Groaning*] You're the bane of my existence, Monica.

MONICA

Now, we'll talk.

STOREY

Well?

MONICA

Storey—tell the truth—wouldn't you rather have me sitting on your lap this way than Mrs. Frayne?

STOREY

Don't get fresh, Monica. Besides, the query is totally irrelevant.

MONICA

It isn't at all. It's got everything to do with everything. I can't imagine Mrs. Frayne sitting on anybody's lap. She's too—dignified.

STOREY

No one requires you to imagine that, my dear.

MONICA

[*Defiantly*] I don't like Mrs. Frayne.

STOREY

She likes you.

MONICA

I don't believe it. I'm sure she says nasty things about me.

STOREY

She doesn't discuss you. She thinks you're very pretty but adolescent.

MONICA

[*With a wicked smile*] I may be young but my thoughts are mature.

STOREY

[*Pretending to be shocked*] Monica!

MONICA

No, I don't like Mrs. Frayne. She's a bad influence on you.

STOREY

Will you please stop chattering about Kendall and tell me about you and Austin?

MONICA

You hate to have me criticize her. I know it.

STOREY

I'm really very busy, Monica.

MONICA

Busy! Bless your heart, you never do a thing.

STOREY

I might if you'd marry Austin and save me worrying about you.

MONICA

[*Incredulously*] Would you really let me marry him?

STOREY

Let you! My God! I pray for it.

MONICA

You'd go to church—and—watch it happen——?

STOREY

Why not?

MONICA

And go home and rub your palms and say "That's that," I suppose.

STOREY

[*Touched*] Oh, now, Monica! You know I'll always be awfully fond of you.

MONICA

Fond——!

STOREY

Mighty lucky for you I'm not in love with you.

MONICA

Oh, I wish you were. I'd be awfully happy if you were.

STOREY

We'd probably marry and that would be the end of us. The end of you at any rate.

MONICA

Why? We'd be a charming couple.

STOREY

[*Abruptly*] Tell me about you and Austin.

MONICA

[*Cuddling to him*] I will.

STOREY

Well?

MONICA

Don't hurry me, darling. I'm going to stay here a long time.

STOREY

Unfortunately——

MONICA

[*Putting her hand over his mouth*] Unfortunately, nothing. I'm going to stay here and dine with you and then we'll have a long talk and after that—we'll take a walk——

STOREY

And after that?

MONICA

I'll come back with you if you like. Storey, if you ruin me will you make an honest woman of me?

STOREY

I won't marry you, Monica, no matter what you do.

MONICA

[*Sighing*] Gee, Storey, you're hard to get.

STOREY

You *are* a sweet child. I'm not as indifferent to you as I pretend.

MONICA

Aren't you?

STOREY

Of course I'm not.

MONICA

Don't you want to kiss me? [*He does. She kisses him passionately.*] Oh, Storey, I'm so unhappy.
[*She buries her head on his shoulder, crying.*]

STOREY

[*Stroking her hair*] Why, darling?

MONICA

[*Muffled*] Because nobody loves me.

STOREY

Austin loves you. He's crazy about you.

MONICA

[*Getting up and stamping her foot*] Oh, don't talk to me about Austin.

STOREY

Why shouldn't I?

MONICA

Because he bores me. He bores me to death. I never want to see him again.
[*There is a pause.*]

STOREY

Monica, I want to tell you something. Listen. [*He draws her to him again.*] Listen. I intend to be honest about Austin. You get me, don't you? He's so helpless

—that I don't intend to take advantage of him. Besides, he's a fine fellow. Awfully sincere. Awfully honest——

MONICA

He bores me. I don't like him.

STOREY

He's inarticulate, but he's a fine brain.

MONICA

But I love you, Storey.

STOREY

Now don't be a silly child. What sort of life do you suppose we should have together?

MONICA

Cozy.

STOREY

And what'll we live on?

MONICA

I'll work.

STOREY

At what?

MONICA

I'll typewrite.

STOREY

What?

MONICA

Your stories. I'll go in the movies! I have a friend who's a director.

STOREY

Your mother would be delighted!

MONICA

By the way—I've told Mother.

STOREY

You've told Mother what?

MONICA

That I can't marry Austin because I'm in love with you.

STOREY

You didn't——!

MONICA

Mother despises you, Storey.

STOREY

[*Very angry*] And you're fool enough to tell her——!

MONICA

[*Misunderstanding*] It doesn't matter to me that she doesn't like you. It just makes me love you all the more——

STOREY

That's not the point. How dare you——

MONICA

Oh, that's not all I told her.

STOREY

It's quite enough——

MONICA

[*In one breath*] I told her you loved me too, and that you'd asked me to marry you and that I'd said yes. I intend to make quite a campaign, you see.

STOREY

I've a good mind to spank you!

MONICA

I thought that if I told Mother you'd asked me that you would be—sort of compromised. You see, I'm trying to get it spread around—that we're engaged.
[*He starts to speak.*]

STOREY

Now look here, Monica.
[*She puts her hand over his mouth to stifle his protest.*]

MONICA

For once don't talk and listen to me. The fact is that I'm doing all this for your good.

STOREY

Thank you!

MONICA

For your good, Mr. Storey.

STOREY

Would you mind telling me——!

MONICA

Of course I'll tell you. You see I know, I'm just certain—that way down deep it's me you love—and not Mrs. Frayne or anybody else. Since you love me you ought to marry me.

STOREY

You've been reading again.

MONICA

You admit that the only reason you *don't* ask me is because you're poor and you think I want all sorts of frivolous things. It's just like you—you're so splendid and always thinking of other people——

STOREY

[*In despair*] Good God!

MONICA

But you misjudge me, Storey. Honestly you do. I could be awfully happy on just what you have.

STOREY

Perhaps. But *I* couldn't.

MONICA

You ought to marry a poor girl, Storey. It would stimulate you, make you work harder.

STOREY

Are you quite through?

MONICA

Not quite. I just got an idea. I think I'll 'phone an announcement of our engagement to the newspapers.

STOREY

[*Really frightened*] You'll do no such thing.

MONICA

[*Laughing joyously*] I've got you, Storey—I've got you at last.

STOREY

Come here. Now, come here.

MONICA

No way out of it for you, Storey. You're cooked.

STOREY

Come here! [*Leading her to sofa.*] Now sit down like a lamb and concentrate on what I'm going to tell you.

MONICA

[*Demurely*] All right, teacher.

STOREY

How old are you, Monica?

MONICA

You know perfectly well. I'm twenty.

STOREY

Now listen—this is serious. I'm thirty-one.

MONICA

Nice age for a man.

STOREY

Eleven years older than you. Just think when I'm forty-one—that's middle-aged, you know, Monica——

MONICA

I'll be thirty-one. Think how attractive I'll be.

STOREY

Of course you will. And I'll be—bald and wrinkled and—— Oh I know that's been said before.

MONICA

No, you won't. Your hair'll be just touched with gray. You'll look very distinguished.

STOREY

I'm too old for you, Monica.

MONICA

And yet you want me to marry Austin. He's as old as the hills.

STOREY

He's two years younger than I am.

MONICA

Well, he seems lots older. He's so correct—like an old deacon.

STOREY

You talk outrageously when he's around.

MONICA

I love to shock him. He's such a Puritan!

STOREY

You've got to stop reproaching me, before him, for not having an affair with you. It gets on my nerves.

MONICA

I believe I shock you, too, Storey.

STOREY

Not in the least. But I hate to see the poor fellow suffer.

MONICA

Austin's so literal. Absolutely no glimmering of humour. Oh! This will make you laugh—wait till I show you!

[*She runs back to get her bag, dredges in it.*]

STOREY

Nobody in love has a sense of humour!

MONICA

[*Holding up magazine*] Look what he sent me——

STOREY

[*Taking the austerely covered pamphlet*] Proceedings of the American Chemical Society——

MONICA

With an article by Austin in it—look—here——

STOREY

[*Reading*] "A new method of separating atoms and ions which are chemically similar but have different weights by diffusion—including the separation of radium from the barium residues." Tells you what to expect, doesn't it?

MONICA

Now whatever do you think Austin——!

STOREY

[*Intent on the article*] This is very touching, Monica.

MONICA

I know, but—why it's nearly all figures—it would take an expert to——

[*He hasn't removed his eyes from the article; she stands looking at it with him.*]

STOREY

Has a brilliant climax, this thing.

MONICA

Climax! Where?

STOREY

There. It's an *equation*—can't you see!

MONICA

Oh, Storey, come now! I don't believe you have the faintest idea what it's all about.

STOREY

Of course I haven't. I've had a shallow literary education. But I *can* see this—that in this chaos here in the first part of his article—you see—in this abracadabra—this forest of figures—Austin had scented somewhere, an equation lurking. And he's found it,

damn him, dredged it out of the morass, lifted it into clear light—and there it is!

MONICA

Oh, Storey!

STOREY

I'm perfectly serious, Monica. And I think it was very sweet of him to send you this—if you had any imagination you'd see—it's a tender, a beautiful gesture—this [*tapping paper*] this is *his lyric*, Monica.

MONICA

I prefer lyrics that rhyme.

STOREY

An equation is a rhyme—a perfect rhyme, subtler and harder to find than any you'll see in *my* effusions—— [*Flinging the thing away.*] How do you know what hope for the future is hidden in this little prose-poem?

MONICA

You're so generous about others, Storey. I love you for it!

STOREY

Don't be too sure of my motive. Perhaps it's because I want to get conveniently rid of *you!*

[MONICA *presents herself before him, shaking her head stubbornly, her hands crossed behind her back.*]

MONICA

It's no good, Storey! You might as well give up!

STOREY

Now please be serious, Monica. Austin'll make you a wonderful husband. You're lovely and his money will provide you with the exquisite background your beauty requires. . . . And he's *good!*

MONICA

[*Sitting on sofa, piteously*] I just can't do it, Storey. Please don't ask me to.

STOREY

He won't bother you. Spends ages in his laboratory, you know.

MONICA

I'm sure he doesn't sleep in the laboratory.

STOREY

Oh now, Monica. Really, you're impossible.

MONICA

Am I so terrible, Storey? Don't *you* love me at all?

STOREY

I'm frightfully fond of you—crazy about you.

MONICA

Then why do you keep me in suspense like this?

STOREY

Monica, you're so young. I know so much more about life than you do. I know what would happen—I know this feeling you have for me now—won't last.

MONICA

But I swear—I'll never love anybody else. If you don't marry me—I'll go into a convent. I swear.

STOREY

I'm going to marry Mrs. Frayne—if she'll have me.

MONICA

[*Passionately*] Just because she's rich! You know you wouldn't think of marrying her if she weren't—the trouble with you is—you're damned selfish.

STOREY

Of course I am.

MONICA

Just admitting it doesn't do any good. You like to go around and be petted by people. And your silly little comforts. You see, I know, deep down, you're fonder of me than of any one. Just as I know that I'm fonder of you than I ever shall be of any one—— [*He*

makes a sudden move toward her; is irresistibly attracted, stops.] Obey that impulse.

STOREY

It's ridiculous. Impossible. Ridiculous.

MONICA

Why not?

STOREY

You're a silly child. You don't know anything about anything. You don't know what you want, really.

MONICA

Yes, I do know.

STOREY

[*disturbed*] I warn you, Monica—if you keep this up I *will* marry you.

MONICA

You won't be sorry if you do, Storey. I swear it's for you as much as for myself. I want to save you.

STOREY

Save me?

MONICA

I want you to live up to the best that's in you.

STOREY

My God, Monica, I believe you have the makings of a good woman.

MONICA

You ought to marry me for the sake of your art. If you marry Mrs. Frayne you'll be so comfortable you won't write a thing.

STOREY

I am thirty-one and in full possession of my senses. It would be positively immoral for me to marry you.

MONICA

But it would be more moral than anything else you could do to me.

STOREY

[*Looking at her with perplexity. The door-bell rings*] Thank God! Austin.
[*He jumps up.*]

MONICA

[*Terrified*] Austin!

STOREY

Well, I think it's Austin.
[*The bell rings again.*]

MONICA

Don't answer. He'll go away.

STOREY

I couldn't do that.

MONICA

Did you know he was coming?

STOREY

I wasn't sure.

MONICA

Promise you'll get rid of him—promise.

STOREY

I'll do what I can—— [*Bell rings.*] Why doesn't he come in. The door's open.

[*He goes out.* MONICA *walks about petulantly. She flings a pillow violently into a corner.* AUSTIN *comes in followed by* STOREY.]

MONICA

Hello, Anti Genesis.

STOREY

Anti what?

MONICA

Don't you know my little pet-name for Austin? Anti Genesis.

STOREY

How come? Eh?

AUSTIN

Monica actually believed the world began in the Garden of Eden.

MONICA

[*Slyly*] Austin disillusioned me about the book of Genesis.

AUSTIN

[*Seriously*] She'd never heard of the nebular theory.

STOREY

Monica!—Oh well, you mustn't mind her, Austin. It's the fashion nowadays to be flippant. Monica gets it from me. The difference is—my flippancy is a sort of defence. Monica's is a boast. The nice thing though about Monica is she doesn't know anything. Gives one a pleasant sense of omniscience—— [*The 'phone rings.* STOREY *answers it.*] Yes—oh, hello—waiting for me? —why, our engagement was for Tuesday, wasn't it?— Dear me, is *this* Tuesday?—How awfully stupid of me—the truth is I've been so lost in my work—yes, I can make it easily by seven—I'll be right over—Good-bye. [*He hangs up.*] Certainly lucky you dropped in, Austin.

MONICA

[*Sensing something*] What's happened now?

STOREY

The fact is, my dear, I can't dine with you after all.

MONICA

[*Furious*] Oh, can't you?

STOREY

I had no idea it was Tuesday. I thought it was Monday.

MONICA

Of course when one works as hard as you do one is apt to forget the day of the week!

STOREY

[*To* AUSTIN] I've ordered dinner for two. Would you mind dining with Monica instead of me?

AUSTIN

[*Overjoyed*] Right here?

STOREY

I've ordered a delicious dinner from downstairs.

AUSTIN

I'd love to. That is, if Monica——

MONICA

[*Mechanically*] Of course.

STOREY

I've really got to dash. Austin, mind lending me a dollar for taxi fare? Don't believe I've got a cent with me.

AUSTIN

Of course.

[*He takes out a bill and hands it to* STOREY.]

STOREY

One thing about Austin. He's not one of those millionaires who never has any money with him.

AUSTIN

Can give you more. Here's a twenty.

STOREY

Well, perhaps I'd better. [*Takes it.*] So long, children. [*To* AUSTIN.] You'll find everything ready for a cocktail in the kitchenette.

MONICA

Are you coming back?

STOREY

Might. I'll 'phone you.

AUSTIN

I'm not very good at mixing cocktails.

STOREY

And you a chemist——!

MONICA

This is a dirty trick, Storey.

STOREY

[*To* AUSTIN] You'll find a recipe in the kitchenette.

AUSTIN

Will I? You'll have to help me, Monica.

[*He goes past* STOREY *into hallway.*]

MONICA

[*White with anger*] You're dining with Mrs. Frayne.

STOREY

Yes. In five years you'll thank me. In less——

MONICA

All right for you, Storey!

STOREY

Good-bye, darling. Be nice to him.

[*He goes out. He can be heard saying "So long, Austin," as he exits.* MONICA *moves down-stage;* AUSTIN *reappears with a cocktail shaker.*]

AUSTIN

It doesn't say how much absinthe or how much vermouth—— [MONICA *says nothing. Her face is set in misery.* AUSTIN *comes down a little. He stands awkwardly holding the cocktail mixer by the neck. Wistfully:*] I don't know—do you put absinthe or do you put vermouth——

[*She turns away impatiently. The curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Scene 1

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *8:30. Two hours after the fall of the first act curtain.*

AT RISE: AUSTIN *and* MONICA *are discovered at the gate-legged table, finishing dinner.* MONICA *dallies with a dessert.* AUSTIN *watches her, wondering what to say.*

AUSTIN

[*Finally*] Will you have some more coffee?

MONICA

No, thanks.

[*There is another pause.*]

AUSTIN

[*Mournfully*] It's—it's jolly to be sitting here and eating like this.

MONICA

[*Mechanically*] Isn't it?

AUSTIN

It is for me, anyway. [*As she says nothing.*] I suppose you're—bored.

MONICA

Why, I'm not.

AUSTIN

I wish I knew how to amuse you, Monica.

MONICA

You're a dear, Austin. You're far too nice for me.

AUSTIN

Too nice for *you*. . . .

MONICA

You are, really. You're a great man. And awfully modest and nice. I'm just a restless little nobody who doesn't know what she wants.

AUSTIN

You're fairly certain about what you don't want——

MONICA

I'm afraid I know what I want too, Austin.

AUSTIN

I wish I were fluent, like Storey. I wish I could talk, like Storey.

MONICA

What would you say?

AUSTIN

I'd tell you I love you.

MONICA

But you've told me that. And I've told you that I don't admire your choice.

AUSTIN

I know.

[*There is a pause.*]

MONICA

There's no reason why we can't be friends.

AUSTIN

That's like telling a starving man—there's no reason he can't look at the food in a baker's window.

MONICA

Why Austin, you're brilliant to-night.

AUSTIN

[*Emboldened by his success*] I feel that if I could find the words—— Somewhere there must be the words that would say what I feel for you. And once you knew what I feel, I feel you would love me.

MONICA

[*Half-listening*] I wonder——

AUSTIN

Yes. I feel that. What I say to you is banal, trite. I have no gift of speech. I know it. I—I'm dumb.

MONICA

[*Touched, patting his hand*] You *are* a dear, Austin. I'm very fond of you.

AUSTIN

Last night you said—you never wanted to see me again.

MONICA

[*Rising, walking about the room*] Last night? I was tired, upset——

AUSTIN

You said——

MONICA

Please, Austin, don't talk to me any more about last night.

AUSTIN

[*Meekly*] All right, Monica. [*One of those pauses.*] Would you—would you like to go to a theatre?

MONICA

No. Thank you.

AUSTIN

Storey says Gertrude Lawrence——

MONICA

I've seen her.

AUSTIN

We could go to the opera. My mother has a box——

MONICA

Not to-night, Austin, thanks. Storey said he'd telephone, didn't he?

AUSTIN

Did he?

MONICA

I think he did.

[*A pause.* MONICA *lights a cigarette. Walks about restlessly.*]

AUSTIN

I believe Storey's dining with Mrs. Frayne.

MONICA

Is he?

AUSTIN

Yes.

MONICA

Austin?

AUSTIN

Yes?

MONICA

Do you like Mrs. Frayne?

AUSTIN

Yes. I think she's a lovely woman. Don't you?

MONICA

She probably was.

AUSTIN

I wonder—will Storey marry her?

MONICA

I've no idea.

AUSTIN

I think she's in love with him.

MONICA

Why not?

AUSTIN

I think it would be a good match. Don't you?

MONICA

How can I tell?

AUSTIN

Storey sees her every day.

MONICA

Can't we really find any one to talk about except Storey?

AUSTIN

Well, you're so keen about him.

MONICA

What makes you think that?

AUSTIN

Aren't you?

MONICA

I despise him.

AUSTIN

But last night——

MONICA

Last night doesn't matter. To-day does.

AUSTIN

[*Very happy*] Then you——!

MONICA

I despise him.

[*She slumps into the chair near the tabouret where* STOREY *has put the check* KENDALL *has given him.*]

AUSTIN

Then perhaps—— [*He moves toward her uncertainly, pauses, does not know what to say. She is lost in a dream, does not hear him.*] Then perhaps——

MONICA

Perhaps what?

AUSTIN

If there's no one else—I mean if you're not in love with Storey—or any one else—perhaps——

MONICA

[*Almost in tears*] Please, Austin—be a darling and don't—don't make love to me.

AUSTIN

I can't help it. Isn't it awful? I can't make love to you—and I don't know what else to talk about.

MONICA

Talk to me—talk to me about evolution.

AUSTIN

But you said you preferred the Garden of Eden.

MONICA

To—primeval chaos. Yes. Don't you? Isn't a nice garden full of wild flowers better than a lot of—slime?

AUSTIN

[*Distressed*] But the Bible isn't true.

MONICA

What of it? Adam and Eve were such a *nice* couple.

AUSTIN

I can't see the use in talking about anything—that isn't true.

MONICA

[*With a sigh*] That shuts out so many subjects.

AUSTIN

[*Hesitating*] Did you—did you get the—my—the article I sent you?

MONICA

Oh yes, thanks! How awfully clever you are!

AUSTIN

[*Greatly flustered, blushing*] Oh—it was just—that's what I've been working on a good deal lately—a new method of separating radium——

MONICA

[*Gently*] Of course I don't pretend to have understood it——

AUSTIN

That's the trouble—unless you know the vocabulary of science it doesn't mean much—like giving the score of a symphony to a person who can't read it.

MONICA

I know. I'm terribly ignorant, Austin.

AUSTIN

You think what I do is awfully dull, don't you? If you'd come with me sometimes to the laboratory—I'd like to show you—it's really awfully interesting—it's exciting.

MONICA

Oh, for you!

AUSTIN

No, for anybody—Monica, I wish you'd let me read you something——

MONICA

From your article?

AUSTIN

No. From a book I've brought you.

MONICA

Oh! Thank you, Austin. What's the book?

AUSTIN

[*Producing it*] It's by Bertrand Russell——

MONICA

[*A bit let down*] Oh!

AUSTIN

You know who he is, don't you?

MONICA

[*Doubtfully*] Well, I've heard of him.

AUSTIN

Well, he's just one of the greatest men alive, that's all.

MONICA

[*Touched by his eagerness; she pats his arm*] Is he, Austin?

AUSTIN

I came across this passage the other day—I marked it—I thought—the minute I read it—"I *must* get this for Monica!"

MONICA

[*Peering over at book*] "Mysticism and Logic." What a nice title! Ordinarily you'd never think of putting those two together, would you? [*But her thoughts wander off to* STOREY.]

AUSTIN

They're a lot of essays—this one's about mathematics. [*Reading.*] "Mathematics, rightly viewed,

possesses not only truth but supreme beauty—a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry." [*The cadence of* Austin's *voice, his profound sincerity and the beauty of the passage itself affect* Monica—*as a bit of sad music might. She is quite rapt. But* Austin *feels suddenly unsure.*] Interesting, isn't it?

Monica

Oh, yes! Do go on!

Austin

"Remote from human passions, remote even from the pitiful facts of nature, the generations have gradually created an ordered cosmos, where pure thought can dwell as in its natural home, and where one, at least, of our nobler impulses can escape from the dreary exile of the actual world."

[*He stops a moment to look at her and finds her eyes full of tears.*]

Austin

Monica! You're crying!

MONICA

I wish *I* could do that!

AUSTIN

What?

MONICA

Escape from the dreary exile of the actual world.

AUSTIN

Aren't you happy, Monica?

MONICA

Not very. Why don't you marry somebody else, somebody worthy of you?

AUSTIN

Whom?

MONICA

That awfully clever girl. You know, that girl I met you with. You told me she was a research chemist. What's a research chemist?

AUSTIN

A person who engages in chemical research.

MONICA

Oh!—Well, why don't you marry *her*, Austin? She seemed awfully nice.

AUSTIN

She *is* nice.

MONICA

And I suppose she adores you.

AUSTIN

Yes. She does like me.

MONICA

There you are!

AUSTIN

[*Shaking his head*] No.

MONICA

Why not?

AUSTIN

For one thing—she knows too much for me.

MONICA

Ho! Vain!

AUSTIN

She wears woollen stockings.

MONICA

Ah, Austin, *you are* a funny man. [*Looking at him closely.*] I believe you're quite serious. You've no sense of humour, Austin. Sometimes—it's delicious.

AUSTIN

I prefer you, Monica.

MONICA

For a man who lives by his brain—you're awfully illogical, Austin.

AUSTIN

I know I am. I've tried to reason you—out of my—consciousness. I can't do it.

MONICA

Well, I'm as stupid as you are. Stupider.

AUSTIN

Why?

MONICA

For—loving him.

AUSTIN

Loving whom?

MONICA

Storey.

AUSTIN

Storey!

MONICA

Of course. Who else?

AUSTIN

[*Altogether bewildered*] But—but you just said—you despised him.

MONICA

[*Helplessly*] Oh, Austin——

[*She covers her face with her hands.*]

AUSTIN

I don't understand you at all, Monica.

MONICA

You really shouldn't try, Austin——

[*She gets up, her dress catches in the tabouret, overturning it. He rights it, picking up the check and papers.*]

AUSTIN

[*Picking up the things*] How careless Storey is—leaving a check lying around like this.

MONICA

A check? Didn't know he had a check.

AUSTIN

Five hundred dollars for a story.

MONICA

Five hundred! Why he didn't tell me. Let me see it.[*She takes check, looks at it and sees* MRS. FRAYNE'S

signature. Her fingers clutch over it. Casually:] How do you know he got it for a story?

AUSTIN

He told me. I asked him whether he needed money.

MONICA

He did, of course!

AUSTIN

He said he didn't—because he'd just had this check.

MONICA

[*Bitterly, crumpling the check*] The highest bidder!

AUSTIN

[*Alarmed*] Here, what are you doing——?

MONICA

I'm sorry.

[*She returns check to him, he straightens it, refolds it neatly. Can't help seeing the name, looks at* MONICA, *whose eyes do not meet his. Puts check back.*]

AUSTIN

Well—why not?

MONICA

I think it's—beastly.

AUSTIN

As they'll probably marry soon—I don't see any harm in it.

MONICA

[*Passionately*] They sha'n't marry!

AUSTIN

Monica—do you want to marry Storey yourself?

MONICA

Storey's in love with me.

AUSTIN

He isn't. He told me so.

MONICA

When?

AUSTIN

Just before you came.

MONICA

He lied.

AUSTIN

Why should he lie? I asked him to tell me the truth.

MONICA

He did lie. You wait. You'll see.

AUSTIN

He wouldn't take money from Mrs. Frayne—like this—if——

MONICA

You're naïve, Austin.

AUSTIN

I don't understand. I don't understand Storey. Why he should lie——

MONICA

She's trying to buy him.

AUSTIN

[*A little bitterly*] He seems willing to sell.

MONICA

He has no character. Not an ounce. No backbone——

AUSTIN

And yet—you want him.

MONICA

Yes. Worse luck——

AUSTIN

I wish I'd never met you, Monica.

MONICA

[*Snapping up the check again*] Money! Money, Austin! [*Abruptly:*] I'm through with him.

AUSTIN

I should think you'd have more—pride.

MONICA

I'm off him for life. I swear it, Austin. Try me. Test me.

AUSTIN

How do you mean?

MONICA

Make love to me. Do something. You'll see.

AUSTIN

You know, Monica, I—I'm crazy about you. I don't have to tell you——

MONICA

Propose to me.

AUSTIN

You know how I feel.

MONICA

Are your intentions honourable?

AUSTIN

What do you mean?

MONICA

You still want to marry me, don't you?

AUSTIN

Of course. What else?

MONICA

I accept.

AUSTIN

Monica! Really?

MONICA

Yes.

AUSTIN

You'll—marry me?

MONICA

[*Suddenly colourless*] If you like, Austin.

AUSTIN

[*Overjoyed, advancing toward her*] Monica! Can I —can't I——?

MONICA

[*Drawing away*] No, Austin——!

AUSTIN

I mean—can I tell everybody?

MONICA

Oh! Of course. Why not?

AUSTIN

I'll try to make you happy, Monica.

MONICA

[*With an impulse to cry*] Thanks, Austin.
[*The door-bell rings.*]

AUSTIN

I wonder who that is.

MONICA

Must be Storey.

AUSTIN

And Mrs. Frayne.
[*There is a knock on the inside door.*]

STOREY

[*Off*] It's only me. [*He comes in.*] Thought I'd warn you.

AUSTIN

Hello, Storey!

STOREY

Hello, Archimedes. Well, Miss Grey—— [MONICA *turns her back on him and walks upstage.*] Nice dinner?

AUSTIN

Fine.

STOREY

Kendall and I dined at the Colony. [*Looking from one to the other.*] What are you depressed about? Eh?

AUSTIN

We're not depressed. That is—I'm not.

STOREY

Well, you act like it. What's the matter, Monica?

AUSTIN

[*As* MONICA *turns away*] Monica's just accepted me.

STOREY

Really? No—really?

AUSTIN

[*Doubtfully*] That's what she said.

STOREY

Splendid. I congratulate you, Austin. I congratulate you both. Austin—mind if I kiss the bride?
[*He turns to kiss her.*]

MONICA

[*Fiercely*] Don't come near me!

STOREY

What's the matter?—Austin——

AUSTIN

She's a little upset—who wouldn't be?

STOREY

Well!

AUSTIN

Where's Mrs. Frayne?

STOREY

Gone home to dress. Too bad Monica's in such a singular mood. Kendall wants us to go on a party.

MONICA

I want to go home. Austin, take me home.

STOREY

Oh, come now, Monica, be a sport. Now you're finally engaged to Austin—that's all the more reason to celebrate. You both run along and dress and we'll all meet here at eleven o'clock. Go to that new coloured cabaret in Harlem. Kendall's sending champagne——

MONICA

I don't want her champagne.

STOREY

Because you haven't tasted it. I had some at dinner. Marvellous.

MONICA

I tell you I don't want to go.

STOREY

Austin, exert your new-found authority. Make her behave.

AUSTIN

If she wants to go home——

STOREY

That's a bad way to start, Austin. If you begin by giving her her own way she'll bully you all your life.

MONICA

[*Bitterly*] Yes, Austin, listen to him. Do what *he* tells you. The authority! The philosopher. Knows everything. Tells everybody what to do, how to behave——

STOREY

Of course. My own behaviour is so bad I can point the path of righteousness to other people. The drunkard lecturing on temperance——

[*There is a pause.* AUSTIN's *conquest has not made him happy.* MONICA *stands still, undecided, trembling with anger.* STOREY *alone remains imperturbable. He rather enjoys the situation.*]

AUSTIN

Guess we'll go home——

STOREY

The truth is, children, I'm a little tight. Ever get drunk, Austin?

AUSTIN

Once. Long time ago.

STOREY

Remember how it felt?

AUSTIN

Like *mal de mer.*

STOREY

Must have been bad stuff. Wait till you taste Kendall's champagne. It gives you ultimate sight, ultimate comprehension——

AUSTIN

And a head in the morning.

STOREY

But isn't it worth it? Wonderful illusions of grandeur——

AUSTIN

What's the good of illusions?

STOREY

Make reality bearable.

MONICA

[*Suddenly*] I think they make it more difficult.

AUSTIN

Well, Monica——

MONICA

[*To* STOREY] Pay our respects to Mrs. Frayne. Tell her we're grateful for her invitation but that we can't take advantage of her hospitality to-night.

STOREY

For pity's sake, Monica, stop talking like an etiquette-book.

AUSTIN

Monica's right. It *would* be better——

STOREY

Oh, come now. Have a heart, both of you.

MONICA

I don't see why you want *us* when you have Mrs. Frayne.

STOREY

Of course I want you. I feel gay to-night!

MONICA

Be gay with Mrs. Frayne!

STOREY

Be nice, now, Monica. I've a peculiar feeling about to-night—that it's a sort of valedictory, a sort of farewell. . . . After to-night, things won't be the same, life won't be the same.

AUSTIN

[*Gloomily*] I hope not.

STOREY

You know what I mean—you and Monica'll get married . . . and, I hope, Kendall and I. We'll be stolid, married people. We'll get old. We'll change. We'll drift apart—am I getting sentimental? Well, why not? Be nice, Monica, for once——

MONICA

[*Defiantly*] All right!

STOREY

You're a dear.

AUSTIN

[*Worried*] If you're tired, Monica——

MONICA

No, I've decided. I'm in great spirits now, Storey. All excited. Come on, Austin.

[*She runs out.*]

AUSTIN

[*Shaking his head*] I don't understand her.

STOREY

If you did—you'd disown her. . . . Come back soon. I'll be lonely.

[AUSTIN *goes out. In a moment* MONICA *thrusts her head inside the door and speaks in a loud whisper.*]

MONICA

I'll be right back.

STOREY

Don't you dare. [*She makes a face at him and disappears. After a moment he goes to window in the left wall to watch for their departure. He feels a sense of loss for* MONICA. *Is worried by this mood. Goes to the telephone.*] Regent 2772—please—yes—hello—Mrs. Frayne please—Mr. Storey—hello, Kendall?—what're you doing?—nearly finished?—I want you to come sooner, I'm lonely—want to see you—am I?—unusually what?—oh, ardent—I don't know—feel funny tonight—in the grip of a peculiar emotion—I don't know—when you come I'll describe it to you—by the

way, Monica and Austin Lowe're engaged—they've just left—yes, I want consolation—— [*The door-bell rings.*] Excuse me—what did you say? [*The door-bell rings again.*] There's someone at the door—I've no idea—do come as soon as you can, will you, Ken?—And don't forget the champagne. Bye dear. [*He hangs up, rushes to door, disappears, returns, following* Monica.] What did you do this for? [*It is obvious that* Storey *is a little frightened; he is very fond of her just now.*]

Monica

I persuaded Austin—as he lives uptown and I live down—to let me go home alone.

Storey

You're crazy.

Monica

I wanted to see you alone—to warn you——

Storey

Suppose Austin saw you.

Monica

It can't be helped.

Storey

But it's cruel. You just told him you'd marry him.

MONICA

I had a moment of hating you, of utterly despising you.

STOREY

Go right away. I warn *you.*

MONICA

I saw that check.

STOREY

What check?

MONICA

Mrs. Frayne's for five hundred dollars. Is that your monthly stipend? Or is it weekly?

STOREY

Monica, go away. I've got to dress.

MONICA

[*Aware of her hold on him*] What's the matter, Storey? [*She stands very close to him.*] What's the matter?

STOREY

[*Seizing her in his arms*] Little darling . . . [*He kisses her passionately.*]

MONICA

You do love me, don't you, Storey? It's me you love.

STOREY

This isn't very nice, Monica. It's not at all nice.

MONICA

But, Storey, there's no reason in the world why we shouldn't. We're neither of us married or anything——

STOREY

Austin!

MONICA

Oh, Austin!

STOREY

Kendall.

MONICA

Oh, Kendall!

STOREY

I feel funny about Austin. He's—so—helpless. He's so—in love with you.

MONICA

What about me?

STOREY

When you came in just now and told me you were engaged I felt a quick pain.

MONICA

[~~*Delighted*~~] Did you?

STOREY

I felt suddenly as if nothing could ever make you up to me.

MONICA

You didn't look it. You seemed to take it—quite casually.

STOREY

I'm glad you came back. I want to tell you now. I *do* love you. . . .

MONICA

Tell me. . . .

STOREY

You're rare and exquisite, precious.

MONICA

You're always laughing at me.

STOREY

I know.

MONICA

Make love to me, Storey.

STOREY

I never really forget you. You're never out of my mind. Your gaiety, your sadness, your lovely youth. Your dear laughter—when you laugh it's like the

beginning of the world, before sorrow and death came——

MONICA

Darling.

STOREY

I am old, dearest one.

MONICA

Old! You're not.

STOREY

I am. There's someone else inside me—a second man—a cynical, odious person, who keeps watching me, who keeps listening to what I say, grinning and sophisticated, horrid. . . . He never lets me be—this other man. . . .

MONICA

Kill him.

STOREY

I can't kill him. He'll outlive me.

MONICA

[*Nestling to him*] I'll kill him for you.

STOREY

You can't. Even now he's looking at me. He's mocking me. He's saying: "You damn fool, talking nonsense to this girl—pretending you want her above every-

thing. You're making love to her because words come easily to you. But really you wouldn't get up early in the morning for her. You like to touch her because she's young and firm and lovely. . . ."

MONICA

Don't, Storey.

STOREY

"You wouldn't mind having her but after that——"

MONICA

Storey, listen darling, I know you're fine and decent.

STOREY

He hears you say: "I'm fine and decent." And he says: "The illusion of an adolescent, of a love-struck girl. . . ."

MONICA

I'll beat him, Storey—I'll beat him.

STOREY

I wish you could, honey.

MONICA

I just needed to know that you love me—tell me it again. Let me hear you say it again.

STOREY

I love you.

MONICA

The way you said it before.

STOREY

I'm afraid I can't now.

MONICA

Storey. . . .

STOREY

You see how capricious I am.

MONICA

But you just said it. And when you did I knew it was true.

STOREY

It probably was—then.

MONICA

A minute ago!

STOREY

[*~~Lightly~~*] A minute, a year, a century—what's the difference?

MONICA

But, Storey, I must believe in your love for me. I *must!*

STOREY

Why?

MONICA

Because I've got to believe in something. And if you don't love me—what is there?

STOREY

My dear child. You—*baby!*

MONICA

Don't turn me down, Storey.

[*There is a pause.* STOREY *considers.*]

STOREY

I want you to go away—and marry Austin—and don't come back to see me alone again—ever.

MONICA

I won't. I tell you I won't.

STOREY

But don't you understand? I'm crazy about you. Do you think I'm made of wood?

MONICA

Why don't you take me, Storey?

[*A pause, he is nonplussed.*]

STOREY

My God, child. . . .

MONICA

I'd rather you married me but if you don't want to, —well——

STOREY

Won't you allow me one shred of decency? I want to be loyal to Austin. I want to protect you——

MONICA

I don't want to be protected. Besides, it's all a pose. You want to marry Kendall Frayne so you can have lots of money.

STOREY

What's the use?

MONICA

It's true. You talk about decency. With that check lying there. . . . You ought to be ashamed, Storey.

STOREY

I'm not in the least ashamed. . . .

MONICA

You're just one of those men who goes around eating fine dinners and having a good time—a parasite, Storey.

STOREY

That's what everybody's trying to be in one way or another. Mine's as good as any.

MONICA

Instead of escaping from all this life and—and fighting your own battles with me by your side to help you.

STOREY

[*Accompanying himself on the piano*] Sounds like a popular song. [*Hums*] "With me by your side to help you——"

MONICA

For pity's sake, Storey, how did you get this way? You couldn't have been always like this!

STOREY

Oh, no. I went through the idealistic stage. I used to sit in a garret and believe in Socialism. I used to commit realistic fiction and moonlit poetry. I dreamed——

MONICA

I want to bring back those dreams.

STOREY

Why? What for?

MONICA

You must have been lovely then, Storey. . . .

STOREY

Oh, I was! Lovely!

MONICA

[*Hurt*] Storey!

STOREY

Lovely. I dressed badly and followed the Cults. It didn't take me long to find out how easy it is to starve on Idealism. I had facility and there was a ready market for facility. I got five thousand dollars for writing a white-washed biography of a millionaire sweat-shop owner. That started me. . . . I took the money and went to Italy—and I had a *very good* time.

MONICA

But Storey—you *must* believe in *something*—don't you ever regret—don't you ever wish——?

STOREY

Regret? No. Not in the least. Why should I? I'd do it all over again.

MONICA

I can see that horrid second man in your eyes now laughing. . . .

STOREY

[*Rather gently*] You amuse him.

MONICA

You wait! I'm going to beat him—in spite of you.

STOREY

[*Swayed for a moment, by the possibility*] He's got a terrific start on you, Monica.

MONICA

[*Very confident now*] Trust me. Leave him to me. . . . [*Whispering*] We'll be happy yet, sweetheart!

STOREY

[*Taking her in his arms*] God knows I've done my best. . . ! [*Their embrace lasts several seconds. The door-bell rings.* STOREY, *a bit grimly:*] Lucky for you, young lady——

MONICA

Don't go.

STOREY

Got to. Run home and dress—go upstairs and out through my bedroom.

MONICA

[*To stairs*] All right. But I'm not worried about Kendall now. I'm not worried about anything——

[*The door-bell rings insistently. She runs upstairs and disappears.* STOREY *exits to open the door. For a moment the stage is deserted.*]

STOREY

[*Off*] Oh, from Mrs. Frayne? Thank you!

[*He returns, carrying a hamper of champagne. He puts it on the table. Lifts the cloth covering the bottles. There is a note addressed to him. He takes it out of the envelope.*]

STOREY

[*Reading*] For a good time for all . . .

[*For a moment this symbol of* KENDALL'S *generosity makes him hate himself. . . . The curtain slowly falls.*]

CURTAIN

Scene 2

SCENE: *A lapse of two hours. It is now eleven o'clock.*

AT RISE: MRS. FRAYNE *is discovered at the piano. She is playing the waltz from Strauss's "Rosenkavalier." After a moment she stops and then plays a few bars of a popular sentimental song from music on the piano. The door-bell rings. She rises and goes to open the door. A splendid figure, "majestic" but graceful. She wears a black velvet evening dress cut very low. Fine arms, columnar throat, rather like Sargent's portrait of "Madame X." KENDALL goes out into the hallway and returns in a moment fol-*

lowed by AUSTIN. *He is in evening-dress. His manner with* KENDALL *at first is embarrassed and hesitant. Gradually, however, she puts him at ease; he has that sort of manner.*

KENDALL

Storey's dressing. I'm the first one here.

AUSTIN

Monica's not come yet?

KENDALL

No. Cigarette?

AUSTIN

Er—thanks. [*She lights it for him.*] Thanks.

KENDALL

You and I are the only prompt ones.

AUSTIN

Yes. . . .

KENDALL

Do you know what time it is?

AUSTIN

[*Looking*] Ten minutes past eleven.

KENDALL

I was here promptly at eleven. Storey hadn't even *begun* to dress.

AUSTIN

He hadn't!

KENDALL

I'm awfully glad you came. It was lonesome.
[*She smiles at him.*]

AUSTIN

I—I'm glad I found *you.*

KENDALL

Why do I never see you?

AUSTIN

Er—see me?

KENDALL

Storey talks about you all the time. You're one of the few people he respects. I always ask him to bring you to my house but you never came.

AUSTIN

I'm in the laboratory such a lot.

KENDALL

I know. Still I do wish you'd come some time—and bring Miss Grey. . . .

[*She notices him staring at* MONICA'S *coloured scarf which is lying across a chair.*]

KENDALL

What is it?

AUSTIN

That scarf.

KENDALL

You know it?

AUSTIN

It's—it's Monica's.

KENDALL

You dined here with her—didn't you?

AUSTIN

Yes. I did.

KENDALL

Well, then——

AUSTIN

She wore it when I left with her.

KENDALL

Didn't you take her home?

AUSTIN

She told me to go home alone—to save time.

KENDALL

Well, she probably ran back to tell Storey something.

AUSTIN

[*Bitterly*] She probably did. It must have taken a long time because—when you came, Storey hadn't even begun to dress.

KENDALL

[*After a moment*] I think you can trust Storey.

AUSTIN

Can I?

KENDALL

He told me over the 'phone—you and Miss Grey are engaged.

AUSTIN

There's something funny about it.

KENDALL

There's something funny about most things.

AUSTIN

[*Warming to her*] Mrs. Frayne——

KENDALL

Call me Kendall.

AUSTIN

Thank you. I wonder—I wonder if Storey tells me everything. I mean—about Monica and himself.

KENDALL

Perhaps he doesn't know everything.

AUSTIN

You mean—perhaps he's in love with her and doesn't know it?

KENDALL

Doesn't know it or won't admit it—even to himself. Perhaps.

[*There is a pause.*]

AUSTIN

[*Abruptly*] Are you going to marry Storey?

KENDALL

I don't know.

AUSTIN

[*Naïvely*] I wish you would.

KENDALL

It would solve your problem, wouldn't it? It might complicate mine.

AUSTIN

I'm not even sure it would solve mine. I wish I hadn't got into this.

KENDALL

[*She stops playing*] It's comforting to know that even a scientific genius is not immune. It rather justifies a weak woman—like me.

AUSTIN

It's rotten to be this way. Wondering about everything, suspecting everybody. Why should I care if Monica came back here or not? And yet—I do.

KENDALL

[*Slowly*] I care too, Austin. Isn't it—stupid?

AUSTIN

Do you think Monica's in love with Storey?

KENDALL

You want me to tell you she isn't, don't you?

AUSTIN

Sometimes she tells me she loathes him. . . .

KENDALL

That's bad.

AUSTIN

Do you think so?

KENDALL

Wouldn't it be nice if people were like molecules or electrons or whatever you work with? It would be nice for you because you understand all about those things.

AUSTIN

Molecules are mysterious but they're more predictable than Monica. They obey some sort of law.

KENDALL

[*Amused and touched by his sincerity*] I think you're charming, Austin.

AUSTIN

Don't say that. I know better.

KENDALL

But you are!

AUSTIN

I'm dull and thick-witted and I—I have no words. I can't talk.

KENDALL

I think you do very well.

AUSTIN

[*Emboldened*] Well, that's because it's you.

KENDALL

[*She is still at piano. She plays Tchaikowsky's "Wer Nun die Sehnsucht Kennt"*] I?

AUSTIN

I find it easy to talk to you. Why is it?

KENDALL

Perhaps it's because—we're sympathetic.

AUSTIN

I feel I know where I am with you. With Monica I never know.

KENDALL

But you don't want to be anywhere with me. With me—you don't have to make an effort. That's why you find me easy to be with.

AUSTIN

I—I'd like you to be my friend.

KENDALL

Gladly.

AUSTIN

Won't you tell me—what to do?

KENDALL

Aren't you assuming—I'm wiser than I really am?

AUSTIN

But you *are* wise. You know all about the world and—you know—you're sophisticated. [KENDALL *is amused.*] You've had all sorts of—experiences.

KENDALL

I'm more experienced than you, I fancy. But no amount of experience can keep you from falling in love with the wrong man, or the wrong woman. . . .

AUSTIN

I know that Storey isn't the right man for Monica. I know that he won't make her—happy.

KENDALL

I think he's sufficiently honest to have told her that himself.

AUSTIN

But he should *convince* her. What's the good of all his talk if he can't convince her?

KENDALL

[*Still amused*] The more he talks the less convinced she probably is.

AUSTIN

[*Fingering scarf*] I don't see why she should have returned here.

KENDALL

[*Shrugging her shoulders*] Some trivial reason, most likely.

AUSTIN

She must have been here quite a time—if Storey wasn't dressed—when you came.

KENDALL

You know Storey. Never hurries. . . .

AUSTIN

It's funny. . . .

KENDALL

I've said—I think you can trust Storey.

AUSTIN

[*Bitterly*] Can I?

KENDALL

[*Surprised at his tone*] Why Austin. . . .!

[*Enter* STOREY, *dressed.* KENDALL *moves to the piano.* AUSTIN *remains fixed, makes no move toward* STOREY.]

STOREY

Awfully sorry to keep you waiting. But, then, Monica isn't here yet, either.

KENDALL

[*From the piano*] Two hours to dress. There's a fop for you, Austin.

[*She plays a sentimental song.*]

STOREY

[*To* AUSTIN] Fact is I tried to write a little after you and Monica left.

AUSTIN

[*Stiffly*] Did you?

STOREY

A few lines. . . .

KENDALL

[*Continuing to play*] You're getting industrious, Storey. What's the matter?

STOREY

I've decided to marry, settle down, cultivate the virtues.

AUSTIN

Marry?

STOREY

Don't you know I propose to Mrs. Frayne every day? And if I'm to support her in the style to which she's been accustomed I've got to work much harder.

KENDALL

[*Leaving the piano*] Don't you believe him, Austin. I looked at your manuscript before Austin came and there was only one sentence added to what I read this afternoon.

[*She goes to the tabouret and picks up manuscript.*]

STOREY

But that one sentence was born of a travail—lasting two hours.

KENDALL

[*Picking up manuscript and reading*] "She rose and left him . . ." Did it take you two hours to write that?

STOREY

I did brilliantly to write that in two hours. The exquisite simplicity of that sentence! The compactness of it! Think of the million things I might have written. Think of all the sentences in the world. And I picked that one. In two hours! The tremendous—celerity of the choice astonishes me now I think of it. How did I do it?

KENDALL

[*To* AUSTIN] Is he drunk?

STOREY

..No, but it's a good idea. [*He pours champagne.*] Kendall. . . . [*He hands her a glass.*] Austin . . .

AUSTIN

No, thanks.

STOREY

But you've got to. It's to celebrate your engagement to Monica.

AUSTIN

I don't feel like it.

STOREY

But I want us all to be gay to-night. I can't get comfortably drunk with a sober man in the party.

KENDALL

Don't make him drink if he doesn't want to, Storey.

STOREY

Austin, have you ever been drunk in your life?

AUSTIN

Not really drunk, no.

STOREY

[*To* KENDALL] Imagine that!

KENDALL

If you're gloomy when you begin, drink only intensifies your mood.

STOREY

Nonsense.

KENDALL

Well, so I've heard.

STOREY

Here, Austin. It's glorious stuff. Drink it and in ten minutes you'll feel imperial, omniscient. You'll know more about physics than Einstein—the Universe'll stretch out below you like a plaid.

AUSTIN

What's the use of a sensation like that?

STOREY

What's the use of love?

AUSTIN

Well, I'll drink it anyway.
[*They lift their glasses.*]

KENDALL

Happy days. . . .

STOREY

Happy days. . . . [*They drink. Quoting:*] "The true, the blushful Hippocrene."

KENDALL

Nothing blushful about Roget. You're colour-blind, Storey.

STOREY

Just an excuse to quote Keats. "With beaded bubbles winking at the brim . . ."

AUSTIN

[*Truculently*] Let's have another!

STOREY

That's the spirit. . . .
[*The door-bell rings.*]

KENDALL

Miss Grey. . . .

STOREY

I'll let her in. Pour the drinks, Austin. . . . [*He goes out.* AUSTIN *looks uncomfortable. He pours the champagne. Watches the door.* KENDALL *watches him.* MONICA *comes in. She looks charming in a simple eve-*

ning frock, a picture of youthful loveliness. STOREY *follows her.*] May I present Miss Grey. . . .?

MONICA

[*A bit self-conscious*] Hello, Mrs. Frayne.

STOREY

I believe you've met Mr. Lowe. . . .

MONICA

Hello, Austin.

STOREY

Austin's on the loose to-night, Monica. Just guzzling champagne. . . .

KENDALL

Where would you like to go, Miss Grey? I haven't made a reservation anywhere. I wanted to know which dance-place you preferred.

MONICA

I am crazy about the music at the Trocadero.

KENDALL

Storey, will you telephone?

MONICA

Although you can't dance there. It's too crowded.

KENDALL

They're all crowded.

STOREY

I've heard of a marvellous coloured place——

MONICA

Oh, where?

STOREY

In the heart of Harlem.

MONICA

[*Excited*] Oh, let's go!

STOREY

I'm told you have to be a good shot . . .

KENDALL

Is that the place where the man was killed?

STOREY

Yes.

MONICA

How exciting!

STOREY

Austin, you're marrying a savage.

AUSTIN

Am I?

MONICA

Are you jilting me, Austin?

KENDALL

If we're going anywhere—we'd better start.

AUSTIN

[*A trifle desperately*] One more drink. . . .

STOREY

Good! I always felt, Austin, if you ever got started——

[*He pours.*]

MONICA

A little one for me.

STOREY

This is Roget '15.

MONICA

Is it? Well, then, a big one.

KENDALL

None for me, Storey.

STOREY

Oh, please—we'll drink a toast. [*He pours for himself.*] To our married life. . . .!

MONICA

But I haven't got one.

STOREY

But you will.

MONICA

Proposing to me, Storey?

STOREY

Don't flirt, Monica. Austin's jealous enough already. . . .

KENDALL

What a prosaic toast!

STOREY

Exactly. [*Lifting glass.*] To our married life—may it be like the good prose of the English masters, solid, clear, sometimes hovering close to poetry—but in the main sensible and intelligent and—well-behaved. [*They drink.*]

KENDALL

Nice toast, Storey.

MONICA

I don't think it's nice at all. I certainly don't want that sort of marriage.

STOREY

Let's drink to your sort.

MONICA

I'd like my marriage to be always like fine poetry—thrilling and exciting—and occasionally sensible and well-behaved—like prose.

STOREY

A large order, Austin!

AUSTIN

[*Bitterly*] I suppose you mean that only you could fill it.

MONICA

[*Amazed*] Why, Austin. . . .!
[*There is an embarrassed pause.*]

KENDALL

We'd better be starting.

STOREY

No, wait a minute. [*To* AUSTIN:] Are you angry with me?

KENDALL

It's the wine . . .

AUSTIN

[*Sullenly*] No, it's not the wine.

STOREY

What is it then? Come on—out with it. In *vino veritas!*

MONICA

What does that mean?

STOREY

It means that when you're tight you tell your right name.

MONICA

Oh, that's exciting! Everybody tell the truth—the absolute truth.

STOREY

We're not drunk enough for that.

AUSTIN

[*To* MONICA] You might begin by telling me why you lied to me to-night.

KENDALL

Now, you see, Storey . . .!

STOREY

You *have* had too much, Austin.

AUSTIN

[*Defiant*] I'll have as much as I like. [*He pours himself another glassful and gulps it. He still addresses* MONICA:] You told me you were going downtown. You came back here.

MONICA

Yes, I did!

AUSTIN

I found your scarf.

STOREY

[*Pouring himself a drink*] What if she did?

AUSTIN

I suspected something. When she told me to go on alone—I came back and saw her go in. I hung around in the street——

KENDALL

Do let's get started.

STOREY

[*Drinking*] Let's talk it out. You hung around in the street. *You*, Austin!

AUSTIN

Yes, I did. It was all I could do to keep from bursting in on you and—shouting. I hated you, Storey. I hate you now.

STOREY

Why?

AUSTIN

I resent you. I resent your fluency, your gift of words, your superficial . . . I resent you.

STOREY

[*Pours*] Have another.

KENDALL

Please, Storey . . .!

STOREY

Why not? All of us. It's a rare moment. I feel we'll talk. We'll really talk—all of us. This sort of thing doesn't happen. It'll be—revealing. [*Lifting his glass.*] I swear to tell the truth—and nothing but the truth—so help me—Horace!

[*They all stand, glass in hand.*]

KENDALL

Something tells me we'll all be sorry for this. You, Storey, more than the rest.

STOREY

[*Recklessly*] I'll risk it. [*Lifting his glass.*] To the Truth. [*He drinks and* AUSTIN, MONICA *and* KENDALL *just sip their wine.*] Think of it—here is Austin Lowe—standing in the street, eating his heart out, hating me. Why? Because Monica ran upstairs to prattle some nonsense that seemed to her important. The most promising young scientist in America—reduced to the level of an Apache. Did you hate me bitterly, Austin?

AUSTIN

I wanted you to die.

STOREY

What did you think was happening in here?

KENDALL

This is silly.

STOREY

[*To* AUSTIN] I'll reward your frankness. I'll be frank too.

AUSTIN

I pictured her coming in here—going to you—I pictured her looking up to you with love in her eyes—love that should have been meant for me. I pictured—I wanted you to die!

STOREY

Sex reduces everybody to a common denominator. Here's Austin . . . always telling me that all creation is the result of an accident. . . .

AUSTIN

What's that got to do with it?

STOREY

You told me once that a slight change in the temperature a few thousand years ago would have put us all

at the mercy of the ants. . . . You're more conscious than any of us of the insignificance of man, of the feebleness of his cry amid the vast solitudes of time and space. Your knowledge makes you one man in ten million. And yet you stand in the streets looking up at that window and wanting to kill me because I'm kissing a girl! Savage, Austin!

AUSTIN

I suppose you're so damn civilized.

STOREY

I? Not at all. When I came into this room before and you told me Monica was going to marry you I felt a pang of resentment too.

MONICA

[*Delighted*] It was true, then!

STOREY

Oh, it didn't spring from love for you. I felt: Why does *he* deserve her? I felt an impulse to take her away from you.

KENDALL

This is interesting, Storey.

STOREY

[*To her*] It's not that I'm in love with Monica.

MONICA

[*Sipping her wine*] Fib!

STOREY

[*Ignoring her*] It's that I resent Austin. I'm jealous of him. I envy him his scientific eminence, I envy him his money. . . .

KENDALL

You might envy his sincerity, his character.

STOREY

I wouldn't have his character for worlds. It would destroy my amusements. [*Interested in his own reaction.*] I said to myself: "Why should this mole-like creature"—meaning Austin—"possess this radiant girl?"

AUSTIN

I know that's what you think—I'm a mole, a scientific mole.

STOREY

Did I say that?

KENDALL

You're a third-rate writer and Austin is a first-rate scientist.

MONICA

Storey's not third-rate.

STOREY

My dear child, it's true. Artistically I'm third-rate. My mind is not as superficial as my work. . . .

KENDALL

Or as your life.

STOREY

I can't take myself seriously—that's my tragedy.

MONICA

Well, I don't care *what* you are. . . . I love you, Storey!

STOREY

Really, Monica, you'll embarrass me.

KENDALL

We mustn't give Miss Grey more champagne.

AUSTIN

I don't think I'll have a very good time at this party. I'm going home.

STOREY

You won't. I won't let you.

AUSTIN

[*Like a child who feels he's not wanted by anybody*] I don't see why *I* should stay.

KENDALL

Nor I. It appears we ought to leave Monica and Storey alone.

STOREY

That would be a calamity.

KENDALL

[*Feline*] For Miss Grey?

STOREY

For both of us. It would tie us to each other for ever.

MONICA

I don't see where the calamity comes in . . .

STOREY

You're too young to see. You're too much in love to see. But I see—for both of us.

KENDALL

If Austin and I had any sense we'd leave you together.

MONICA

Why don't you?

KENDALL

Why don't I?

MONICA

[*Challenging*] Why don't you?

KENDALL

[*Slowly*] Because——

MONICA

Because?

KENDALL

I'm afraid I should have a sleepless night.

STOREY

If I were a cad I should have an affair with Monica. But regrettably I am a Puritan. Can't help it. It's in my blood.

MONICA

Liar!

STOREY

You are right, Monica. It is not Puritanism. It's prudence. I'd have to marry you. That would be fatal.

MONICA

Why?

STOREY

You would be happy for a year and unhappy the rest of your life. If you marry Austin you'll be unhappy for a year and happy the rest of your life.

KENDALL

And if I marry you?

STOREY

[*Pouring champagne for her*] Your life will have the excitement of a perilous risk.

KENDALL

But I don't want excitement. I want—tranquillity, I want to be secure.

STOREY

Then you should marry Austin. Matrimonially he is a gilt-edged bond. I am a highly speculative stock.

KENDALL

What do you say, Austin?

AUSTIN

[*Who is befuddled now*] What do I say to what?

KENDALL

Shall we be sensible? Shall we get married—you and I?

MONICA

Say yes, Austin.

AUSTIN

But I'm not in love with her. I'm in love with you.

KENDALL

[*To* STOREY] I'm out of luck, Storey.

STOREY

Don't weep over him. I'll take you on.

KENDALL

You're the only resource left me. I accept you—not because you're worthy—but because I can't help it.

STOREY

You hear, everybody—she accepts me.

KENDALL

I'll take a—flyer in you.

STOREY

[*Touching his glass to hers*] And I'll try not to fluctuate too much. [*After he drinks.*] Now then, Austin. Your way is clear.

KENDALL

And now I really think we've talked enough nonsense. We'd better start.

STOREY

I'm just in the mood for a good jazz band.

KENDALL

Who'll carry the champagne?

STOREY

Austin.

AUSTIN

[*In better spirits*] I'll take it. [*He lifts hamper.*] Monica, I don't dance. Will you teach me?

MONICA

[*Tensely*] Before we go—there's something *I* want to say.

STOREY

You'll tell us in the taxi.

MONICA

No. Here.

KENDALL

Another revelation?

MONICA

Yes.

[*Her voice and manner are very strained, like one keyed up to accomplish an impossible feat.*]

STOREY

What's the matter, Monica? Aren't you well?

KENDALL

You would start this.

AUSTIN

[*Very concerned*] Monica . . .!

MONICA

Since everybody's telling the truth—why shouldn't I?

STOREY

Don't say anything you'll be sorry for.

MONICA

Even if I *am* sorry—I'm going to say it.

KENDALL

I really think we ought to go out.

AUSTIN

The fresh air'll do her good.

MONICA

I'll say it if it—kills me.

AUSTIN

[*Anxious*] What *is* it, Monica.

STOREY

[*Suspicious*] Watch your step, child.

MONICA

I think you ought to know it, Mrs. Frayne. Austin, I think you ought to know it.

AUSTIN

I know more than I want to now. [*Picking up her wraps.*] There's been too much confession. Let's start.

MONICA

No, stop. All of you. I want you to know—that Storey—Storey is the father of my child—my unborn child.

STOREY

[*Amazed*] Monica!

MONICA

There now, I've said it. I feel better.

[*She takes a quick gulp of champagne.* KENDALL *and* AUSTIN *stare accusingly at* STOREY. *They are speechless.*]

STOREY

She's ill. She's had too much champagne.

MONICA

I haven't. I've had less than any of you.

STOREY

Monica—you're—— [*Turning to the others.*] Surely, you don't believe——

MONICA

If I had the courage to tell it. . . .

[*She turns away. She cannot finish. The strain has really made her faint.*]

KENDALL

I did think, Storey, that you observed *some* code.

STOREY

But I tell you, the child is—she's irresponsible. She's doing this——

AUSTIN

[*Almost screaming*] You cad! You damn, dirty cad!

KENDALL

We'd better go. Austin, will you take me home.

STOREY

She doesn't know what she's saying, I tell you.

MONICA

I do, too.

STOREY

Kendall, for pity's sake, listen.

KENDALL

I never want to see you again. Are you coming, Austin?
[*She is at the door.*]

AUSTIN

[*Broken*] Monica, is it—true?

MONICA

Yes, Austin.
[KENDALL *goes out.*]

AUSTIN

True. . . .

STOREY

Austin, I swear to you it's not true. She's crazy.

AUSTIN

[*Laughing a bit wildly*] Well—of course. Why not?
[*He picks up* MONICA's *scarf lying on the chair, drops it and goes out. Between* STOREY *and* MONICA *there is a long silence. He simply stares at her.*]

MONICA

[*At last*] Gee, what've I done? [STOREY *still stares at her.*] I had no idea they'd raise such a fuss. . . . But once I got started I couldn't back out, could I? [*As he does not speak.*] You're angry? After all it was

harder for me than it was for you. [*He still says nothing.*] Please say something, Storey. If you don't—I'll cry.

STOREY

You think you're smart, don't you?

MONICA

I think I'm brave. Storey, it's for you I did it too.

STOREY

Oh, for me.

MONICA

Storey—don't you want me?

STOREY

No.

MONICA

To-night—when I came back here—you made me feel you did. I was sure you did.

STOREY

That will pass and what will be left?

MONICA

Isn't there more to it than that, Storey?

STOREY

No.

MONICA

I won't let you go, Storey. I'm going to fight for you—I'm going to bring you back—to what you were—to that youth you've let go. . . . It's your one chance now, Storey—your last desperate chance—don't you see, Storey?

STOREY

But I don't want to go back. I can't go back.

MONICA

It's such a little distance, Storey.

STOREY

Is it?

MONICA

These things you're selling yourself for—what good are they? Is *this* [*she includes the room in a gesture*] what you *really* want? I can't believe it. Storey, dearest, I can see such a fine way we might live. . . .

STOREY

I tell you it wouldn't work, Monica—even if I did try to be what you think I could be—it would be no use.

MONICA

I can't think of arguments the way you can—I can't put things the way you can—I just know that if you

had any bravery—if you had any courage . . . all these things you say are lies you've made up—lies to justify yourself, to prop you up—you're a pampered, weak thing dawdling away your life on a sofa when you might be standing up straight on your own feet. . . .

STOREY

Perhaps. Only I can see us now—five years from now—in a cheap flat—you looking blowsy—with little wrinkles under your eyes—and I in cheap shirts and cracked shoes—brooding in a room over a corpse of my genius. . . . [*He gets up and goes to the piano and fills her glass.*] Well, I'll marry you—but the joke's on you. . . . You can't have life on your own terms, Monica. I can't. Nobody can.

MONICA

Compromise. . . . I suppose I'll come to that, too.

STOREY

[*He drinks and goes to her*] What's the use of thinking? Let's finish the champagne. Oh, you are lovely—kiss me.

MONICA

No, Storey.

STOREY

Now that you have lost your illusions you can begin to live.

[*She looks at him—falters to the chair. A little laugh breaks from her. . . . She sinks into the chair weeping piteously.* STOREY *watches her—he gulps another drink—but her misery touches him. Compassionate he runs to her—kneels beside her, strokes her hair.*]

STOREY

[*Desperate—to stanch her grief*] Monica, darling, don't. I'll try. I'll try. Maybe I can do it. Maybe with you—I can do it—dear Monica. Dear child. I'll try. I'll try. I'll try.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *The next morning.*

AT RISE: STOREY *is discovered, immured within his writing board, trying to work. Puts down a sentence. Regards it. Isn't pleased. Gets up. Lights a cigarette. Takes a turn about the room, returns, picks up his Ms. and, with an impulse of disgust crumples it in his hand and throws it into the empty fireplace. Picks up the magazine* KENDALL *had been reading in the first act, looks at that and flings the magazine, too into the fireplace.*

STOREY

[*Savagely*] Trash . . . trash . . . trash . . . ! [*Catches sight of himself in the mirror above the fireplace, regards himself in it.*] Trash . . . ! [*Nevertheless he straightens his tie, and settles his dressing-gown, an instinct of foppishness not to be denied. The door-bell rings.*] Damn . . . ! [*It rings again . . . Shouting:*] I'm not at home . . . [*He starts across the room to see who it is.* AUSTIN *appears in the doorway.*]

AUSTIN

Hall door was open.

STOREY

[*Really glad to see him*] Hello! I say—you look done in. What's the matter? [AUSTIN *does, in fact, look terrible. He has evidently been walking in the rain, his clothes are bedraggled. He hasn't slept. The champagne has made him ill all night. He is unshaved. His hands tremble. He is feverish and on the verge of being really ill.*] What's the matter? Here—sit down. [AUSTIN *shakes his head as* STOREY *proffers a chair.*] You've been out in the rain.

AUSTIN

Yes.

STOREY

What doing?

AUSTIN

Walking.

STOREY

But, my dear fellow. You shouldn't be doing that. You're obviously ill.

AUSTIN

[*Deadly serious*] This isn't a friendly visit.

STOREY

No?

AUSTIN

I've come to kill you.

STOREY

My dear Austin. You *are* ill!

AUSTIN

That's why I've come.

STOREY

I tell you there isn't a reason on earth why you should hate me.

AUSTIN

No reason!

STOREY

Last night was as illusory as a nightmare.

AUSTIN

Don't deny anything. It only makes you more—hateful.

STOREY

To-day Monica will probably tell you herself—it was a lie.

AUSTIN

Nothing can save you, Storey.

STOREY

My dear chap, let me get you a cup of tea. . . .

AUSTIN

[*Flaring*] Don't you laugh at me!
[*He whips out a gun and points it at him.*]

STOREY

Is it loaded? Am I facing death? The situation is novel but not as thrilling as I might have expected. Do you really mean to kill me, Austin?

AUSTIN

Why do you think I bought it?

STOREY

Did you buy that thing? You needn't have. I have one upstairs. I'd have lent it you.

AUSTIN

You don't believe I'll do it. That's why you're so gay. . . .

STOREY

Ah, I suppose you will. I suppose—at the Threshold of the Great Unknown as they call it—I should be solemn. . . .

AUSTIN

Epigrams!

STOREY

Force of habit, sorry. You press that thing—and no more epigrams. Death is probably very common-

place. Disintegration. Resolution into original elements. Your province, Austin.

AUSTIN

Talker!

STOREY

Can't help it, old dear. It will wag.

AUSTIN

Not a real emotion, not a real feeling—even in the face of death.

STOREY

Real emotions and real feelings are destructive. I've learned to do without them. That's civilization.

AUSTIN

The old boast. . . .!

STOREY

It's true. *You're* in the grip of a real emotion, a real feeling. What's it doin' to you? Never mind what it wants to do to me. Listen a second. If you could empty your heart of its burden as easily as you can empty that cylinder there'd be some sense in curving your little finger. But after I am lying there, silent for once, will you be happier? The world will be emptier for I shall no longer be there—for you to hate.

AUSTIN

The world will be better off without you.

STOREY

Please be honest. Don't pretend this is a crusade. You want to shoot me because you think Monica's belonged to me. You want to shoot me because you're eaten by jealousy. You're not doing it to raise the general level of morality. Don't be a hypocrite, Austin. [*He lights a cigarette.*]

AUSTIN

No matter what the reason—I can't endure your living. . . .

STOREY

That I can understand. [*There is a pause.* AUSTIN *backs off from him as if to take better aim.*] Er—have you made any plans for the future?

AUSTIN

What is it to you?

STOREY

[*Shrugging his shoulders*] Curious. . . .

AUSTIN

First you—then myself.

STOREY

Oh, both of us? Teutonic efficiency. You *are* German, aren't you, Austin? Lowe. Löwe.
[*He pronounces it with the umlaut.*]

AUSTIN

[*In a knot of anger*] Be quiet. . . .

STOREY

It's rather a pity. Loss to the community. You, I mean. First rate men are too rare to be permitted the luxury of suicide. I sha'n't matter. But *you.* It's a shame, really.

AUSTIN

Don't worry about me.

STOREY

But I do. Think of it. You've—let's say thirty years left to make your discoveries in. Science is an endless chain, isn't it? I suppose, really, there is only one science as there is only one art. You might discover a little trifling thing that'll help some other fellow discover another trifling thing and that might lead to—well, anything, mightn't it? [AUSTIN *backs off a little farther. Pursuing his vein.*] Something perfectly tremendous—a cure for cancer or an escalator to Mars or anything, mightn't it? [AUSTIN *backs off more.*] Austin, do you mind not moving away from me? I admit—it makes me nervous.

AUSTIN

Have you nothing else to say?

STOREY

Do you want a last speech? Dear me! I can't think of a thing. Isn't it funny? Now that I'd like to say something brilliant I can't. I've often wondered how all those great men in history pulled their death-bed speeches. Made 'em up in advance, I bet.

AUSTIN

All right then. . . .
[*He levels his gun.*]

STOREY

Wait! I've thought of something. . . .

AUSTIN

Say it quick. . . .

STOREY

His last words were: "Give my love to Monica. . . ."

AUSTIN

[*Wildly*] Damn you. . . .!
[*He fires.* STOREY *has dropped to the ground, the bullet goes three feet over his head.* AUSTIN *thinks he has killed him; he staggers, almost fainting, into a chair.*]

STOREY

God! Austin. You nearly frightened the life out of me. God! [*He pours a drink of Scotch and gulps it.*

Pours another for AUSTIN.] Here. [AUSTIN *shakes his head.*] Do you good.

AUSTIN

Let me alone.

STOREY

[*Drinking it himself*] I saved your life, Austin, as well as my own. I give you back to Science. If you'd hit me they'd have sent you to jail for life. A valuable man like you. The jury system is one of the prime stupidities of democracy, don't you think? [AUSTIN *rises to his feet. He is pitiful.*] Where you going?

AUSTIN

Home.

STOREY

You're in no condition to go home. . . . You're ill, trembling.

AUSTIN

Sorry. Made a fool of myself.

STOREY

[*Supporting him*] What did you do when you left here last night?

AUSTIN

Last night?

STOREY

Yes.

AUSTIN

Went home. Ill. Not used to drinking. That champagne.

STOREY

Eaten anything to-day? [AUSTIN *shakes his head.*] And you've been walking in all that rain? Look here—you've got to drink this.

[*He forces some whiskey between his lips.*]

AUSTIN

Guess I'll go on.

STOREY

Wait till it stops raining.

AUSTIN

Sorry to have. . . .

[*He sways.*]

STOREY

Sha'n't let you go out in this condition.

AUSTIN

Feel wobbly.

STOREY

Tell you what—you'll go in my room and lie down.

AUSTIN

Too much trouble.

STOREY

You've got to. A little nap'll make you as right as—unfortunate simile for a day like this. This way. . . . [*He partly supports him and leads him up the stairs. The door-bell rings.*] Must be Kendall. [*Shouts through door.*] Come in. . . .

AUSTIN

I'll just lie down a minute. . . .

STOREY

A good sleep and a hot bath. . . . [*They exit upstairs.* KENDALL *comes in. She looks around the room.* STOREY *sticks his head in at bedroom door.*] Be with you in a minute, Kendall. Austin. . . . [*His sign mystifies* KENDALL, *except that she gathers that* AUSTIN *is inside.* STOREY *disappears into the bedroom.* KENDALL *catches sight of the pistol which* STOREY *has picked up and put on the table. She sniffs the powder. Goes to fireplace, picks up* STOREY's *crumpled manuscript. Lets it fall again. She is full of thoughts.* STOREY *returns, and, after a moment:*] He came to kill me and remained—to take a nap.

KENDALL

Poor fellow.

STOREY

Poor fellow! I like that. What about *me?*

KENDALL

You deserve it, Storey.

STOREY

What for?

KENDALL

We don't need to discuss it.

STOREY

You mean—last night. It's too silly. Even if it were true. . . .

KENDALL

Don't deny it, Storey. Spare me that!

STOREY

Even if it *were* true—about Monica and me—one doesn't deserve death for that sort of thing.

KENDALL

I'm afraid I'm a very conventional person, Storey. By your standards at any rate.

STOREY

I leave standards to the moralists. I do the best I can. That's what everybody does—in the long run.

KENDALL

I didn't come here to reproach you, Storey.

STOREY

It's a mess, I know. It all comes—from trying to be intelligent.

KENDALL

[*After a moment*] I came to say good-bye. . . .

STOREY

Good-bye?

KENDALL

I'm going abroad.

STOREY

When?

KENDALL

Probably on the *Olympic*. Sailing on the 10th. That will give me time to get my passports.

STOREY

You hate me, don't you?

KENDALL

I don't think so. I feel—dead about you. Just now. . . .

STOREY

I tell you solemnly—that what Monica said last night—isn't true.

KENDALL

Don't stoop to that, Storey. [*She crosses him to fireplace. There is a pause.* STOREY *gives it up.*] I see you've been throwing away your manuscripts.

STOREY

Yes.

KENDALL

A good sign. I believe you might do good work—if you'd settle down.

STOREY

[*Ironically*] Monica's idea.

KENDALL

She must love you very much—to confess before everybody—the way she did last night.

STOREY

[*Wearily*] You don't know the half of it.

KENDALL

It's Monica—Miss Grey—I came to speak to you about—really.

STOREY

Yes?

KENDALL

At first I suppose it'll be a little hard for you—economically. Especially if you mean to do serious work. . . . I thought perhaps. . . .

STOREY

You want to give us money—to start the new life on?

KENDALL

I have so much—and I'm alone.

STOREY

It's an excellent idea. But I'm afraid Monica—wouldn't see it.

KENDALL

She needn't know.

STOREY

[*Ironically*] Would you have us start the new life—with a lie?

KENDALL

Always laughing. . . .

STOREY

Why not? Life is amusing.

KENDALL

You ought to turn over a new leaf, really, Storey.

STOREY

[*Pointing to fireplace*] Look at that manuscript.

KENDALL

That *is* a good sign.

STOREY

Nonsense. An impulse of irritation. The day after I marry I shall be regretting I tore it up. I shall be writing it again—from memory. I shall have to redouble my output because I shall have Monica to support and—you will be in Europe. In time Monica will come to see that I haven't in me the great works which she suspects are secreted in my brain like bonds in a vault. She'll begin to despise me a little bit. And I'll begin—to deceive her a little bit. And there we'll be—a typical married couple.

KENDALL

Poor Monica!

STOREY

It's too bad for both of us, really. You and I might have lived a civilized life. You have the two great requirements for the wife of a poor but intelligent man: money and tolerance.

KENDALL

Unfortunately my tolerance doesn't extend—to this.

STOREY

This—as you call it—is a lie. It doesn't exist.

KENDALL

Good-bye, Storey.

STOREY

I tell you it simply isn't true.

KENDALL

Cheat!

STOREY

I should think Monica's—device—would be transparent to you.

KENDALL

Cad! Good-bye forever.

STOREY

In the end everything is reduced to cliche.

KENDALL

I never want to see you again. . . .
[*She sweeps to the door.*]

AUSTIN

[*Off*] Storey. Storey. . . .

STOREY

Coming. . . . Wait a second, will you, Kendall?

KENDALL

I'm going.
[*The door-bell rings.*]

STOREY

[*On the stairs*] See who that is. And don't go. Have a heart.

[*He disappears.* KENDALL *is at the door when it opens. It is* MONICA.]

MONICA

Oh! I'm sorry. I rang.

KENDALL

I'm just leaving.

MONICA

Is Storey home?

KENDALL

[*Uncertain how much to tell her*] He's—inside.

MONICA

I wanted to see him just for a minute. Please don't go.

KENDALL

I must. I only dropped in—to say good-bye to Storey.

MONICA

Good-bye?

KENDALL

I'm going abroad. I shall be gone a long time.

MONICA

Oh! But you needn't go. . . .

KENDALL

My dear child. . . .

MONICA

And you needn't call me a child. I'm old—now.

KENDALL

All of a sudden?

MONICA

Yes.

KENDALL

What's—aged you?

MONICA

Never mind. But I tell you—sincerely—you needn't go—on my account.

KENDALL

What inspires this mood—of renunciation?

MONICA

It's not renunciation. It's indifference.

KENDALL

I'm afraid—you're deceiving yourself.

MONICA

I'm not. Honestly. You'll see. I came—to tell that—to Storey.

KENDALL

I came once—to tell him that. I stayed, though.

MONICA

This is different.

KENDALL

Oh, you're angry with him. That will pass.

MONICA

But I'm *not* angry with him. This is something else I tell you—something else altogether.

KENDALL

I think you'll be as happy as most people. Good-luck. . . .

[*She reaches out her hand to* MONICA.]

MONICA

[~~*Taking it*~~] You're very much in love with him, aren't you?

KENDALL

I'm used to it. It's only uncomfortable—when I see him. But I'm going away now. I enjoy travelling and altogether I have a pretty good time.

MONICA

But I tell you if it's on account of me—you needn't go.

KENDALL

You're worse off than I am, really. You're in love with a man who doesn't exist. I'm in love with one who does. That's why this sort of thing is less of a shock. . . . If it ever happens to you. . . .

MONICA

Mrs Frayne, I must tell you—what I said last night —wasn't true.

KENDALL

Thanks. But one doesn't invent that sort of lie. . . .

MONICA

But I swear to you I——

[*Enter* STOREY.]

STOREY

Hello, Monica.

MONICA

Hello, Storey.

KENDALL

Good-bye.

STOREY

Oh, don't go. . . .

KENDALL

I really must. . . . [*To* MONICA:] Good-luck. [*She grips her hand, smiles at her and goes.*]

MONICA

She's—awfully nice.

STOREY

Oh, Kendall's one of the best. Understands everything.

MONICA

It hasn't done her much good, has it?

STOREY

How do you mean?

MONICA

She's not very happy.

STOREY

When it comes to that—who is?

MONICA

You manage to have a pleasant time.

STOREY

I manage to behave as if I were having a pleasant time. One owes that to one's friends, I believe—just as one owes it them to be decently shaved and to wear clean linen.

MONICA

That's bunk. You have a good time because you're built that way. You're too selfish to worry about anything.

STOREY

I've reformed. I'm a better man, now, Monica.

MONICA

Are you?

STOREY

Yes.

MONICA

How can you tell?

STOREY

Well, for one thing, I've thrown away the story I was working on. It's in the grate.

MONICA

What made you do that?

STOREY

Last night after you left I had several hours of heroic introspection. Henceforth I shall devote myself to the sincerities, the eternal verities, that sort of thing.

MONICA

I wonder. . . .

STOREY

The trouble is the masses bore me, democracy bores me. I'd like to be Henry James and live with you in England on a private income.

MONICA

Poor Storey! I've robbed you of your subsidy.

STOREY

What do you mean?

MONICA

Mrs. Frayne. I just told her the truth about—last night.

STOREY

Did you?

MONICA

She said: "One doesn't invent that sort of lie."

STOREY

Well, it doesn't matter.

MONICA

[*Sarcastic*] How generous you are!

STOREY

I dare say it'll be the finest possible thing for me to buckle down to hard work. I'll do hack-work to make a living and the rest of the time——

MONICA

The rest of the time?

STOREY

The rest of the time I'll write sombre masterpieces, blood and tears—I'll anatomize suffering. . . .

MONICA

But, Storey, you don't know anything about suffering.

STOREY

Most suffering *is* the bunk, you know, Monica. Unintelligent people who want things beyond their limitations.

MONICA

[*Stamping her foot*] How *can* you be so complacent?

STOREY

You're a victim of the popular prejudice in favour of agony. Why is a book about unhappy, dirty people better than one about gay and comfortable ones?

MONICA

But life *isn't* gay—or comfortable.

STOREY

[*Seriously*] Dear darling, life is sad. I know it's sad. But I think it's gallant—to pretend that it isn't.

MONICA

Poor Austin. . . .

STOREY

What makes you think of him?

MONICA

I've been thinking a lot of him—since last night. I'll never forget his face—the way he looked. And *you* think life is gay—and comfortable!
[*There is a pause.*]

STOREY

[*Sincerely*] Monica. . . .

MONICA

[*Out of a brown study*] Yes.

STOREY

If you take me on—I'll do my best.
[*She stares at him with curiosity, fixedly.*]

MONICA

Will you?

STOREY

I'll try to be—what you think me.

MONICA

Thank you, Storey.

STOREY

Don't you believe me?

MONICA

[*Abstractedly*] What?

STOREY

Don't you believe me? That I'll try. What's the matter? Why are you staring at me?

MONICA

I'm trying to discover what it is.

STOREY

What *what* is? Why is everyone so cryptic to-day?

MONICA

I'm trying to discover what it is—that's changed everything. You *look* the same as you did yesterday.

STOREY

The same face. . . .

MONICA

But I can't remember the time when I loved you. Is it only yesterday—that I loved you?

STOREY

This morning—one A. M.

MONICA

Can't recall what it was like.

STOREY

What's this? Don't tell me you're fickle, too.

MONICA

It's not—fickle. It's that—you seem to be another person. Your voice is different.

STOREY

Slight cold.

MONICA

The things you say—sound hollow to me. I don't love you to-day, Storey.

STOREY

One can't have everything.

MONICA

I'll never be in love with you again, Storey. I'm sure. It's over. It's dead.

STOREY

How do you know? Tell me. I'm interested.

MONICA

I just—know it.

STOREY

The things I said to you last night?

MONICA

I suppose so. I feel—old now, Storey. I see myself—all this time I've loved you—like a person looking from outside, a very old person. I see a little girl, a rather stupid little girl, reading a fairy-tale and believing it true—long after the other children knew it to be a lie.

STOREY

I always told you your idea of me was an idealization.

MONICA

But I never believed it—till last night. Last night I saw you as you really are—mercenary and unadventurous and—practical. I saw your soul.

STOREY

Must we drag the soul into it?

MONICA

I saw it—a rather fat thing lying in an armchair—with a brain ticking, inside, like a clock. . . .

STOREY

But I'm not fat, Monica.

MONICA

Your body isn't and your brain isn't, but your soul *is*, Storey. You know it is.

STOREY

Why *will* women talk about the soul?

MONICA

All night I saw you like that. I said to myself: "When you see him, when he stands in front of you—you'll forget all that, you'll feel as you did before." But I do see you. You do stand in front of me. And it doesn't matter.

STOREY

Don't talk like that. I'll fall in love with you.

MONICA

You're too clever for me, Storey. Your emotions are too complicated.

STOREY

I wish I were like Austin. *His* emotions are as simple as those——

MONICA

[*Tenderly*] As simple as those of a child.

STOREY

[*Rather bitterly*] No second man peering over *his* shoulder.

MONICA

He's a darling.

STOREY

[*Abruptly*] The darling almost shot me this morning.

MONICA

Shot you!

[STOREY *points to the revolver lying on the table. She looks at it, horrified.*]

STOREY

He came here in a simple, uncomplicated mood. He's a rotten shot.

MONICA

Where'd he go?

STOREY

He's upstairs, taking a nap.

MONICA

How is he?

STOREY

Feverish. He'd been up all night, walking in the rain.

MONICA

We ought to have a doctor.

STOREY

I don't think so. Champagne and jealousy.

MONICA

What did he say?

STOREY

He was incoherent. Had an idea he ought to avenge your honour, I suppose. Acted like a moving-picture hero and talked like a commuter. Really, he was ridiculous.

MONICA

Didn't you tell him—that what I said last night——?

STOREY

Of course I told him. But he wouldn't believe me. Nobody'll ever believe the truth now. Really, Monica. . . .

MONICA

[*Thinking only of* AUSTIN] Think what he must have gone through—to want to do that.

STOREY

Can you imagine the trial if he'd succeeded! [*Tracing imaginary headline:*] "Scientist Kills Writer Over Woman. Following an all-night champagne party in Clark Storey's luxurious West Side apartment. . . ." The note of licentiousness—and you on the witness-stand—the story of your confession—everybody'd say I got my deserts and Austin would come out a vindicated Saint George. . . .

MONICA

Don't, Storey.

STOREY

But it's so *pretty,* Monica. It's almost a shame he didn't hit me. Can't you see the humour of it, the lovely irony of it? What would you say on the witness-stand? Would you tell them the truth? That I never ruined you at all, that you lied, to save me from myself, as you call it, to prevent me from making a mercenary marriage. But if you did that you'd deprive the defense of a case. You'd send Austin to the chair. . . .

MONICA

You're dreadful, Storey.

STOREY

And even if you said it was true—there must be difficulties. The prosecution would try to undermine you. They'd want proof beyond your statement. I believe you said you were the mother of my child. Well, they'd want the child. Monica, you'd have to produce a child. . . .

[MONICA *snatches up her wrap to go. She is outraged by his facetiousness.* AUSTIN *appears on the landing.*]

AUSTIN

[*A bit wildly*] Monica! [*He comes downstairs.*]

STOREY

I thought you were asleep.

MONICA

He *is* ill!

AUSTIN

I'm going now.

MONICA

Why he's trembling, feverish. . . .

STOREY

Wait. I'll get him something hot to drink.
[*He goes out.*]

AUSTIN

Did Storey tell you why I—what I——

MONICA

Yes. He told me.

AUSTIN

Think if I had killed him!—the man you love—I'll never forgive myself, Monica.

MONICA

Whatever has happened is my fault.

AUSTIN

I've found out things about myself—what I really am. Look what I tried to do.

MONICA

Don't blame yourself. I can't bear it. It's I. . . .

AUSTIN

No. You must know everything. I must tell you everything. You've got to know. I made up my mind to kill him. And do you know why? It wasn't alone because I hated him—but because I wanted to hurt you. I hated you, Monica.

MONICA

I know.

AUSTIN

But all the time—it's hard for me to explain it—I loved you. You were inside of me. I was desperate—to tear you out. I see now I can't do it. I'll never do it. I have no existence apart from you.

MONICA

Wait—Austin—listen to me. You're trying to explain yourself to me. You needn't. I understand you. I understand you very well. You are clear to me. My trouble is—how will I make myself clear to you? How can I make you understand what happened last night? How I could have said what I did? Because it isn't true, Austin.

AUSTIN

[*Repeating mechanically*] Isn't true. . . .

MONICA

It seemed to me—I thought—that by saying it—I could change everything—make everything over—all in a second. It was so childish. I thought. . . .

AUSTIN

You needn't tell me, Monica.

MONICA

How can I make you understand—that all that's over now—that last night—yesterday—I loved Storey? That to-day I don't?

AUSTIN

[*Simply*] You don't owe me—explanations, Monica.

MONICA

No, but I must. I want you to know everything that's in my thoughts. I mustn't hold anything back from you. I feel pain still about Storey, even now. But it isn't for *him*, do you understand, Austin? It isn't for losing *him!* It's for the feeling I had for him—that it should have been wasted—that feeling that will never come again—that can't come again. . . .

AUSTIN

Mine—remains.

[*There is a pause.*]

MONICA

Are you sorry?

AUSTIN

No.

MONICA

Austin—if you want me—I'll love, honour and obey you. And I'll try to make it up to you—for the bad time I've given you.

AUSTIN

You're here. You're close to me. It's like being alive—for the first time.

[STOREY *comes back; carries glass of punch.*]

STOREY

I had this finished five minutes ago. I drank it and made another. Here, Austin. . . .

AUSTIN

No, thank you, Storey.

MONICA

We're just leaving. . . .

STOREY

Oh! [*A pause.*] Bless you, my children!

AUSTIN

[*Embarrassed*] Er—thanks. Coming, Monica?

MONICA

Yes. Good-bye, Storey.
[AUSTIN *goes out.*]

STOREY

I'm awfully glad, Monica. It's what I always told you to do, isn't it? [*She says nothing. They look at each other. She is affected and he is, too. To break the moment he reverts to flippancy.*] Life does occasionally imitate fiction. A happy ending, eh, Monica?

MONICA

I think so, Storey. Good-bye.
[*She goes out.*]

STOREY

[*After a moment*] That's that. . . . [*He ponders; he is serious. He takes another drink. Walks across the room, sits down, entrenches himself behind the sewing board, is about to write, looks toward the fireplace, goes to it, picks up the torn script and looks at it ruefully.*] Damn fool. . . .! [*Goes back, begins writing, can't concentrate, gets up again, "snaps out of it" and goes to 'phone.*] Regent 2772 please—is Mrs. Frayne there—hello—Kendall?—Storey—I'm frightfully low, Kendall—you've got to come and cheer me up—oh, now, are *you* going to drop me too?—she's gone—certainly, with Austin—we'll dance at their wedding, Kendall—what about dinner?—you're busy—

what?—oh, packing—oh, don't go abroad—if you do let's go together—that *is* an idea—but why?—now please be reasonable—don't tell me you still believe that silly story of Monica's—God, Ken, I've never known you so stubborn—in common justice you ought to take me back on probation until Austin and Monica—that's the very least you can do—and, Kendall, I promise you—I absolutely promise you—that if their baby—if their baby bears the *slightest* resemblance to me—thank God, Kendall, you're laughing—what?—no, why should you?—keep your passport and I'll get another—of course—I can write as well in Europe as I can here—even better—no, I've got a better idea—you cancel your passage and we'll go the Southern route—oh yes, lovely this time of the year—land at Naples and motor to Nice—certainly—along the Riviera—beautiful trip. . . .

[*The descending curtain cuts short his itinerary.*]

CURTAIN

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BORROWER'S NAME
OCT -5 1
MAY 8 '47
MAY 26 '47
APR 11 '49

PS
3503
E37
S4
1927
Ac.33777